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A.B. 1901 - M.D. 1905

1931

ILSE GRAPAN

HEAVY LADEN

(1890)

OLD-FASHIONED
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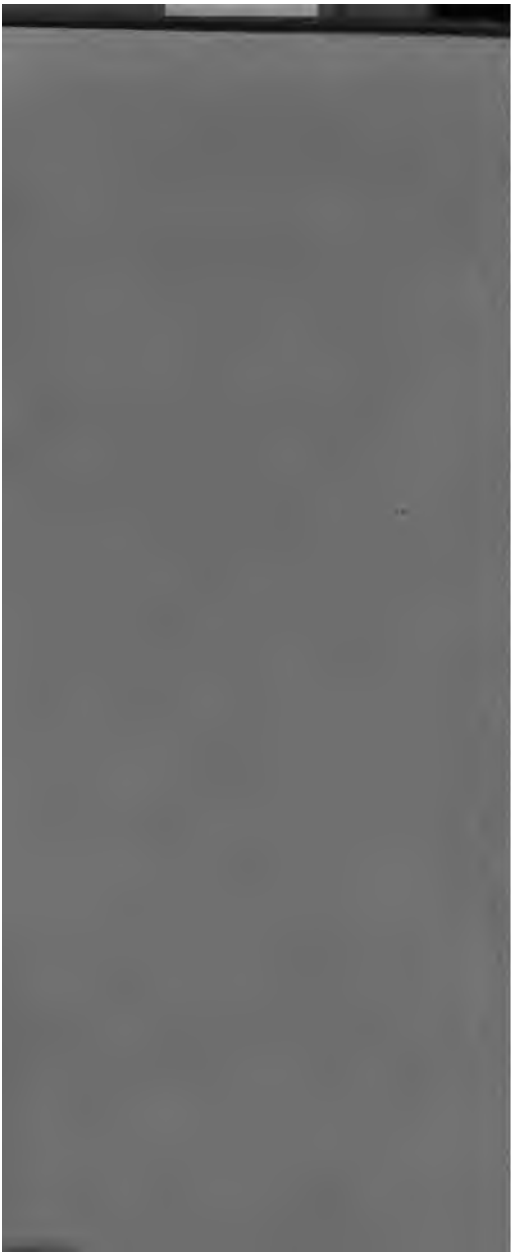
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ILSE FRAPAN

HEAVY LADEN
AND
OLD-FASHIONED
FOLK

TRANSLATED BY
HELEN A. MACDONELL



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PREFACE.

THE two stories which form this volume may, it is hoped, serve to introduce to English readers a captivating German writer. Ilse Frapan, now just beginning to be heard of over here, ranks in her own land among the best artists of her *genre*. The early years of her literary activity have already borne rich fruit, while her youthful vigour and abounding human sympathy warrant the expectation that she holds in reserve gifts of still greater price.

Hitherto she has remained within the unpretending limits of the "Novelle," or short story, as distinguished from that equivalent of our own full-statured novel, the "Roman." In this

less ambitious field of art the Germans have long excelled. Ernst Wechsler, in an appreciative study of Ilse Frapan, contributed to the "Rundschau," dwells on the circumstance that the political and social conditions of his country do not pre-eminently favour the production of great novels, and then goes on to show that the short story is peculiarly well adapted to the genius of the German artist, who delights in sounding the depths of individual rather than of collective experience.

Ilse Frapan above all things paints life at first hand. She possesses the true artist's eye; and the Hamburg that could draw from Heine only the most cynical and scathing sarcasm, has revealed to her a wealth of poetic material.

The scene of some of the stories is laid in South Germany, where the authoress has spent several years. She has mastered the Bavarian and Wurtemberg dia-

lects, and by turns uses these and the distinctive speech of her native town with absolute familiarity. It is to be feared, however, that this salient feature of her work may prove a barrier even to such foreign readers as know German pretty intimately—a matter for true regret, which none can better appreciate than her translator, who realizes vividly how much these gems must perforce lose in the process of being torn from their original setting.

“Altmodische Leute” presented certain all but insuperable difficulties of another kind. It would probably have never seen the light in an English dress, had not a master hand come to the rescue. I am unfortunately not allowed to name the distinguished writer to whom “Herr Tewes” owes his second escape from shipwreck, and must bear my indebtedness in grateful silence.

H. A. M.

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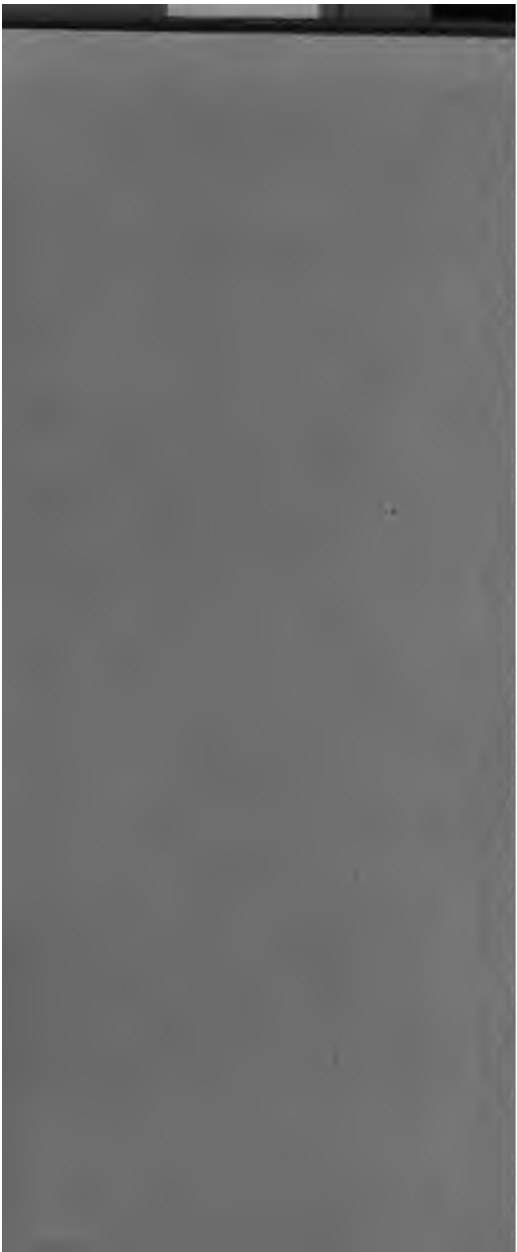
HEAVY LADEN.



HEAVY LADEN.

THE new foreman's first day at the printing-works was over; he handed in his keys at the office, and made for home, the last of the workmen to leave.

The neighbouring chemical factory still remained open, but in the gloomy November twilight the rest of the long Hammerbrook Street looked deserted and lifeless. Tall, grey, sober buildings, either warehouses or factories, stood forth with closed doors and windows, prosaic and morose. Hardly a light was yet visible through the drawn curtains of the cellar-taverns. The whole long dusky row o





HEAVY LADEN
AND
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years ago, as they told him last night at his lodgings.

He had walked so fast that now of a sudden the streets were behind him : an open furrowed tract of country lay like a wilderness in front. He looked about ; neither house nor living creature could he see : he must have gone astray. He glanced aloft in his perplexity. " Does the sun then never shine here ? " he muttered. " It's surely not risen to-day." All at once the cloud mantle was rent ; a sickly yellow light overspread the western sky, making the water gleam like the gold-black scales of a slow moving serpent. Crows flew over the ground in thicker clusters among stacks of wood and heaped-up tiles, and before him—he almost started at the sight—bright blood flashed upon a pane of glass. But it was only the reflection of the setting sun ; he caught the same blood-hued shimmer in the distance on the windows of a wretched little public-house.

"I'd give something to be at Pirna!" he exclaimed; then, however, with a sense of relief, he became aware of voices behind him, of a soft cooing laugh and a well-defined kiss. Listening, he looked round. Out of a roughly carpentered shed in a frozen cabbage field there slipped a child-like maiden with a blue kerchief on her head. A long-limbed workman followed. He was just preparing to throw his arm once more round his companion's waist, but she warned him off, and by a gesture indicated the stranger's presence. The man moved away from her and towards the new-comer, as though expecting him to speak. The foreman, however, only passed him by with a disdainfully casual glance, and raised his hat to the girl, who had turned her little neck aside in some embarrassment.

"Does this road lead to the Franken Street, my Fräulein?"

Blushing, she pointed in the

direction of the town, while with cool effrontery he scanned the delicate oval of her face, tarrying longer than his avowed purpose could well warrant. At length, with a lingering look and airy waving of his hat, he departed, again ignoring the workman whose eyes followed him in indignant astonishment, and who now asked, uttering a short, scornful laugh: "What sort of thing is that?—do you know that barber's block, Gesche?"

"Hush, Hein!" answered the girl with lowered voice, "he's our new overseer."

"Ah, is that so?"

The subject of their discourse glanced stealthily around; in the deep silence he had heard alike question and answer. He had recognized the girl while talking to her. She was one of the hands at the printing-works. The fresh-skinned, fair-haired, liquid-eyed little creature had caught his attention directly. Pretty girls always did strike him; that

he admitted. And she was more carefully dressed than the others; he distinctly recalled her little red apron and her smoothing it out while they conversed together. Her companion appeared to be an uncouth clown; pity that she should waste herself upon him. How poker-like the fellow had stood there, as if anything was wanted of him! Well, he had let him see pretty clearly that he didn't count. Here the foreman drew a small looking-glass out of his pocket, and smilingly contemplated his mustachioed, eagle-nosed reflection. Then he stroked up his black beard, and swung his walking-stick jauntily to and fro, repeating, "Barber's block! barber's block! the stupid oaf!"

In silence the pair trod the long lonely road to Bullerhude. Once Gesa pointed to a photographic studio on a house-top.

"See, Hein, he lives in just such a glass box as that."

"Who, Gesche?"

"Our new foreman, Hein, and he has it all full of flowers, and they say——"

"The hairdresser fellow, do you mean, who gave me the go-by just now as if I'd been a wooden paling?"

"Why, he never meant it that way," laughed the girl; "it was only that he knows me and doesn't know you."

The workman shook his head; his deep-set blue eyes contracted.

"For the matter of that he's nice enough," she urged.

His brow reddened. "What's that to you?" he said abruptly.

"I only meant . . ." murmured Gesa timidly. "Don't be so quick to take offence, Hein."

She tried from her lower level to look up into his half-closed eyes and make him laugh.

He extended his arms towards her, and pressed her to his heart so vehemently that she uttered a cry.

"Ah, Gesche, tell me now, is that barber's block aught to you?"

Would you have me such an one with walking-stick and yellow gloves?"

"Nay, nay," with a deprecating laugh; "but, Hein, he had no gloves."

"They were in his pocket then. I know the ways of his kind. The airs they give themselves! Take my word for it, he's as friendly as an earwig. Don't waste your thoughts on the fellow, Gesch, he's not to be trusted."

"Is the big boy jealous again? —shame, shame! big boy," said she, teasingly.

Then, when no reply was forthcoming, she began to complain of being tired, and nestled close in his encircling arm, her own flung round his sturdy figure as far as it would reach. And so in restored amity they wandered through the thick fog and deepening night among bare trees and dark, quiet furrows, until at length they came to the little house with the green door in

which they occupied a modest basement room.

"Hein, there's a light in our window," cried Gesa, quite cheered before even she had got near it. A bright ray flickered distinctly on the floor. "It's Sophy, you may be sure; I believe I see her sitting there."

Yes, there she sat, a great gaunt woman wearing a dazzlingly white kerchief, her pointed nose bent over a red stocking at which she was industriously knitting, the lamp beside her. She did not notice the two standing at the window and discussing the food question.

"Go you in, Gesch, I'll see to it all," said the man; "a white loaf and four hot smoked sausages. Or won't I do better to take five?"

He ran hurriedly across the street, while Gesa flew down the kitchen stairs, and lightly unlatched the door. At her entry a pretty three-year-old boy in a blue smock hid his curly head in the folds of the woman's skirt

Quickly she turned his small pale face to view.

"Good evening, Gesche," nodding as she spoke, "I've been sitting here this hour and more. My husband's mother is over, and for once I was able to get free." Gesa had rushed merrily up to her sister and snatched the knitting from her hands with boisterous laughter, causing the needles to fall out.

"Don't set to that first thing. You've done quite enough at it to-day."

"You old baby-headed girl," the other scolded, "just you give me that back again. Look at your kettle boiling away like mad. I stood it ready as you should find a taste of something warm when you got in. But where's your husband? Coming directly, eh? Ah, Klefecker, there you are. And what say you to my Ludwig?"

The bonny little lad had already found a place on the man's knee; and clinging to his neck, his

yellow head cushioned against Klefecker's broad chest, seemed in a mood to sleep. Klefecker sat stiff and guardedly upright, his straightened arms held away from the child; while with a beaming yet half shy expression he contemplated the small creature as one might regard a fragile toy.

"Hein is so fond of children," laughed Gesa.

"Won't the boy tire you?" asked the woman in a softened voice. "The wonder is his going to you at all; he's mostly so shy. But children are quick to know them as likes them. He's such a quiet one this Ludge of mine; the clergyman who christened him was fairly fetched with the child. 'Why, he's the look of an angel,' he says to my husband. 'How ever did you come by him?' says he, by way of a joke. 'And,' says he, 'take good care of him, that he may grow up big and strong. There's something more than heavenly, nay, I mean more

than earthly, in his face,' says he. 'I'd like my wife to see him.' There now, Ludje, get down a bit and let your uncle drink. He'll be finding you too heavy."

"Let him be, Sophy," said Klefecker, keeping hold of the boy, "he'll have a drop out of my cup, won't you, Ludwig?"

Gesa had poured out the tea, and now placed the bread and steaming sausages upon the table.

The cloth was of crochet-work with big holes through which the bread crumbs dropped, but Gesa's own hands had wrought it—she couldn't endure a bare table.

"I've brought you something, too; you get it, Ludje."

The lad climbed with deliberation from his uncle's knee, and out of a huge woollen hand-bag dug up a cloth in which a Dutch cheese lay enwrapped.

"We had it given us—two such; our neighbour brought them. Why, just see how he stands staring."

The child had clasped hands together, and stood singing dreamily.

"That's exactly how Gesa always stood, in just that way. And he's like her. When the other children were splashing in the gutter, she looked on and called out, 'More,' but she never went with the rest."

"That I'll answer for," Heinrich, chuckling. "Nothing dirty could stick to her; but that's for ever washing her. Now, with me it's all the other way—everything sticks."

"If the children hit her a blow she could put a brave face on it and bear the pain, but ever they threw her into mud, she would scream and into such a state over her hands that a crowd collected the street."

Gesa drew in her delicate head between her shoulders, blinked placidly at this recollection like a soft white kitten that

being made much of. Her husband's eyes roved through the heaped-up, lop-sided room between the sharply-contrasted faces of the sisters ; then rested upon that of the younger woman. He fondled the child, now again seated on his knee, stroked the soft, warm, wee body with his horny hands, and whispered into the blue smock, "My little Gesch! My little Gesch!"

Deep in crochet-pattern chit-chat the women were far too absorbed to heed him.

* * * *

A week had slipped by ; it was another of the series of gloomy November days. People kept the gas burning in their offices, though the clock had only just struck twelve.

The workman, Heinrich Klefecker, on duty as mid-day watchman, was all alone in the cellar-like premises of the chemical factory. But his thoughts seemed elsewhere engaged.

Every minute his long, angular figure, clad in its close-fitting drab smock, kept appearing in the street. There, with hair erect and bristling from the fumes within, he would stand craning his neck, first outside the broad entrance to the courtyard, then at the low doorway of the adjoining house. It was in the direction of the printing works, however, that his eyes most often turned. Then he would go back to the three-legged stool behind the packing case, which served him as a table, and upon which his midday meal, wrapped in a blue handkerchief, already lay; then into the machinery-shed to fetch his coffee-pot—he had discovered a place where it could easily be heated.

Suddenly he looked round; footsteps and the rustle of a dress were audible in the passage.

"Gesche?" he asked, in a muffled voice, and strained his eyes to pierce through the greasy

yellow vapour that filled the place.

"I'm not your Gesche," a croaking voice replied, and a clumsy figure in a slatternly print gown clambered over the wooden boards with which the slippery, worn-out pavement had here and there been laid. The young workman made a movement of retreat, but the woman was already thrusting her tousled head over the slices of buttered bread and bacon, and sniffing at them with dilated nostrils like a hungry dog.

"You might as well give me a turn once in a way, Hein," and she smirked, nudging him jocosely in the ribs; "I've three little children, and I've no husband; come, my old boy."

She drew her hand out of her matted hair and stretched it over the inviting meal.

"Hands off!" shouted the workman, as he pulled the four corners of the cloth together; "away with you, Melia. If I

were you I wouldn't be for telling the whole world of my affairs; they're none too much to your credit, I'm thinking."

The woman had set her thick, bare arms akimbo, and stood staring at him.

"My stars!" said she, moving slowly away, "aren't we high and mighty?" then she burst into loud laughter. "You'd better look at home first, I should say." A venomous expression came into her dull, protruding eyes as she edged herself up to him once more. "Hein, I may as well let you know that your Gesche won't be coming here to-day; she's just off for a spree to have dinner with our foreman."

"Woman, you lie!" shrieked the workman, starting backwards, his face aflame. "Away with you, away, or I shall strike you, and—but after all she's not worth dirtying one's fingers over." He reached after a heavy poker. Uttering a torrent of abusive

language, and groping her way along, the woman stumbled towards the door. She did not find it without hitting herself against an enormous tank, and narrowly escaped breaking in her skull against the sandstone pillars which supported the vaulted roof. Just as she made her exit, up tripped Gesche, holding her skirts gingerly across the threshold. She turned to look at the departing visitor, then with a merry laugh threw herself down on the packing-case near the blue handkerchief, which she first pushed a little to one side. Melia's broad face reappeared at the door. "The happy pair!" she cried, and straightway vanished.

Gesche no longer laughed. She breathed uneasily, and her cheeks blazed.

"You have had to run for it," said the man, looking sideways.

She nodded, and smoothed out her apron.

"And I'm that hungry, I could all but eat you, Hein."

She snatched up a slice of bread-and-butter, and bit into it without looking at Heinrich.

"Where have you come from? Surely not from the works," said he.

Gesche choked over a crumb and had a fit of coughing. She glanced at him, wondering that he did not offer to pat her on the back. His fists were clenched and his eyes close set. She took a piece of bread out of the cloth and held it to his mouth—"Eat then, Hein!"

"I'm not hungry, Gesche."

She slipped down from the box.

"That red-haired Melia's been speaking ill of me," said she.

A faint shaft of light from a barred window fell upon her as she knelt, setting off the gracefully rounded shoulders, the fair braids about her brow, the blue kerchief at her snowy neck.

She bent her head, unable to bear his searching gaze.

Suddenly he pointed with his finger to her bosom : " What's that ? "

She covered the place quickly with her hand, and tried to smile.

" What, Hein ? this rose ?—a beauty, ain't it ? "

She stooped low enough to smell its perfume.

" What do you look at me that way for ? why do you make such eyes at me ? "

He got up, pushed her hand aside, and tore a dark-red rose out of her dress. For one short instant he contemplated the exquisite flower ; then, with a vigorous swing of his arm, flung it over the girl's head into one of the huge tanks that stood filled with sulphuric acid and lime.

Gesa rushed to the tank with an exclamation of regret. Raising herself on tip-toe she looked in, but nothing was discernible in the muddy yellow pool.

" That'll not come back again," said the workman with a jerk of

his head. "What falls in there never comes back."

Then he pulled her away.

"Don't put your arm on there ; that stuff eats into everything. Just look."

He held up a steel clasp corroded with greenish rust.

"My leather belt slipped into it one day, and you see what's left."

Gesa did not look. Hanging down her head like a pouting child, she had seated herself on the box, her back towards him, while she silently munched her bread.

The man became silent in his turn, and paced with long strides up and down the crowded laboratory, between dusty sacks of lime and straw-bound glass crucibles.

They could not see one another distinctly in the murky atmosphere ; the alkaline fumes were trying to the lungs, and often made them cough. One o'clock struck.

The girl rose slowly, and

shook the crumbs out of her apron. Heinrich paused in his walk.

"Who gave you the rose, Gesche?" he began.

"Good gracious, Hein," she answered, half in impatience, half timidly; "how quick you are to flare up at me! Well, and suppose it is what you imagine! Just as we were all getting up to go to dinner the foreman said to me that he had such lovely roses in his glass box up on the roof there where he lives, and wouldn't I have one? and so I walked to his house with him, and I waited in the street, and he threw me one down in a twist of paper."

"Didn't he want you to go up with him, Gesche?"

"Yes," she replied promptly. "Sure enough; but then it needs two to agree to that sort of thing. I didn't go with him; I waited in the street." Shyly she sought his hand. "You always make mountains out of mole-hills, Hein."

"Nay, nay, nonsense, Gesch! what are you thinking of?"

"Well, I mean," she looked down in petulant confusion. "I just mean that *she* didn't get a rose given her," and she burst into a sudden laugh, and broke away playfully from his side.

The man stood still. The light of the street lamp fell on his distressed and anxious face. He clenched his fist, looked at the little creature, and muttered something between his teeth.

Then she came gliding up to him with bent head like a purring kitten, and slipped under the umbrella. "My old Hein," she whispered.

But he said nothing, and put no life or movement into the hand which she had now seized and was caressing.

"Well, haven't you a word to give me?" she asked in beseeching tones.

Forbiddingly cold, Hein still eyed her in dark silence.

Then her courage failed. Tears

shone in her bright eyes ; she let his hand drop.

“ You’re always getting angry with me,” she sobbed, “ always angry. What do I do that’s wrong ? I’m not so very old. Next month I shall only be eighteen, and I have neither mother nor father left, none but Sophy, and she a step-sister ; and then you, and you get angry directly. I’d rather be ugly, I’d rather be dead. Whether I have a rose or not—and the foreman, how should he trouble himself about me ? He’s a grand gentleman, what good could I be to him, Hein ? And haven’t I my share of worries too ? And how can I help it if I’m just not quite ugly, and you don’t care for me any more, and we’ve been but three months married, — and ———”

A burst of loud crying swallowed up her words. Heinrich had clasped her in his arms, and was saying, “ There now, Gesch, I’m not angry with you, child ;

leave off now. It's not your fault but——"

A sharp gust of wind tore the umbrella out of his hand, and lifted the pair almost off their feet. It made an end of the discourse. They had enough to do to face the storm now taking its November jaunt over the patrician marshland, with its attendant rain and snow and flooding waters.

* * * *

Up in his glass nest, once a photographic studio, the foreman Leopold Jäck, was perishing with cold, though the sun shone in it this cheerful Sunday morning.

The wind had fallen, and it was freezing. Hoar-frost had whitened the whole valley of the Elbe, which his window commanded. The many water-ways and brooklets gleamed with a dull leaden shimmer; pallid sun-rays flashed over the thin ice-crust of the flooded meadows like a myriad of sharp-edged swords converging to a common point.

Thick clustering crowds of men and women streamed to the new centre of attraction; a whole train of little boys on sledges were making for the ice-plain; and in the mist beyond, as he looked through his fingers, curved telescope-wise, Jäck saw that a crescent of tents and booths, some already completed, others in process of construction, had sprung into existence. There was fun to be looked for now, sure enough. He stretched himself in the long-sleeved brown woollen vest that served him as house-coat, glanced at his spindle-shanked nether limbs in their knitted casings, and rose yawning from the wicker-work couch to hunt for his skates. No easy matter that, for the once bare, unfurnished space was encumbered by rough pots of growing plants that stood about the floor among empty cigar-boxes, piled-up newspapers, and a disorderly heap of boots. The shrubs nearest to the window

appeared to have suffered from the cold ; they hung drooping, and the ground was bestrewn with leaves. He lifted up a twig and let it go again. "This confounded hole ! I must contrive to get out of it somehow or other."

Through the window his eye rested on the little neglected bit of garden with its broken iron railing. The straight-set row of small fir trees that bordered it had not thriven in the heavy, boggy soil ; they stood there like rusty pyramids. "I must contrive to get out of it," he repeated, querulously.

Of a sudden his face brightened, expressing keen desire. A graceful form passed by the dilapidated gate, with hopping, bird-like steps. He tore open his little ventilator, and called down, "Gesa !" She was still within earshot, a tremor seemed to pass through her slight frame ; but she quickened her pace without looking back.

The foreman gnawed his moustache angrily. "Confound

the little witch! she heard me perfectly well, but won't give a sign in return. And withal a coquette to her very finger-tips. Ha, ha! that fellow's at the bottom of it, of course, the lanky drab yokel with whom she keeps company! but it shall not go on."

Hastily he threw a coat over his woollen vest, opened a drawer, took from it a handful of money, and slipped it uncounted into his trouser pocket.

"She shall yet be tamed, shall yet be made to yield. Why else should she promenade before my windows?"

He uttered a confident laugh while he sought for a flower among the plants. Nothing coloured was forthcoming, and he ended by sticking a small laurel twig into his button-hole, after which, standing before the mirror, he indulged in a fresh study of his smooth, hawk-like face, moistening his dry lips with his tongue the while. Then he

rushed down the four pairs of stairs, skates on arm, in the direction the girl had taken.

The strong air made his eyes water to such an extent that the eye-glasses, kept only for Sunday wear, had every minute to be taken off and rubbed. He stamped his feet on the half frozen earth to get them warm as he walked along, and carried his stick horizontally under his arm in order to keep his hands in his coat pockets. Once when a woman, angrily objecting to this practice, knocked down the stick, and even met his attempted remonstrance with a threatening fist, he felt half minded to go back home. Such an old hag is a bird of evil-omen. His fair prey had disappeared. He paused to consider. Then he thought he saw the workman, the rival lover—the notion of wanting anything of his, a clodhopper like that, made him smile—pass by on one side of the street. But was it he? Anyhow it was an

overgrown being with somewhat stooping shoulders who trudged along lifting his feet as though he were stepping over mole-hills—a regular peasant's gait. Yes, that was certainly the defiant-looking fellow with the sandy grey hair who held poor Gesa captive. If only he hadn't such uncomfortably sturdy limbs! But he would be even with him yet; he would let the man know that he counted for no more than a dirt heap in his eyes. And the girl must be brought to see it too. He swung himself round on his heels, and strutted away in the direction of the tents—surely he should find her there.

He was in such a hurry that he managed to stumble over a board that had been laid down at the edge of the ice, and caught his foot in a shallow hole, to the great delight of the loafers and street boys who formed a double ring round the skating ground, where, loudly importunate, they clamoured to fasten people's

skates or push the larger of the hired sledges at so much a head. Jäck's thin-soled boot had let in the water—tiresome this, and not quite safe. Perhaps after all he ought to go back. But the swaying crowd, the laughter, the music, and above all the baited hook of pretty Gesa's eyes held him fast bound. There would be a chance of getting dry at the bar yonder, of a drink, and even, perhaps, of dancing himself warm. In his easy-going fashion he stepped carelessly into the largest and most imposing of the booths, on whose summit a big Hamburg flag fluttered in the northern breeze. The close crowded enclosure was in a state of semi-darkness, its human contents mingling with the fumes of spirits and tobacco. The long wooden tables were thickly packed: hardly a vacant place was to be found. Jäck's glance roved restlessly up and down; he saw nothing, however, of the two who occupied his thoughts.

They were, as it happened, sitting far behind him in the slightly raised alcove appropriated to the band, now playing outside. Moreover, they were partly hidden by the red curtains that hung from the ceiling and divided this recess from the main body of the room. Heinrich had carried a table and a couple of chairs in here; he and Gesa sat close to one another, in warm and satisfied well-being, glad to be clear of the pressing throng. Young men seated near who caught sight of her in her retreat could not keep their eyes off the fresh winsome apparition that, amid a sea of withered or bloated faces, looked as would a ripe peach amongst wrinkled pippins, or plumped out cooking fruit. She wore her clinging blue dress, and carried her yellow-tinted kerchief, with a certain distinction; her movements were graceful, though she laughed over every morsel she lifted to her

lips, and at every word that her companion uttered. She seemed to know that laughter became her, and to seek the reflection of her mirth upon his face, young like her own, but which, grey and pallid from unwholesome work, was as a shadow at her side. However, the momentary comfort, and his pleasure in her, had softened and cheered him, and he often smiled while he gazed down upon her and brushed the long fair hair from her eyes and brow. Once, as he leaned forward to hear more distinctly, she caught him saucily by the head : " Hold still a moment, Hein ; you look a regular ragamuffin. Let me tidy you a bit, you savage."

He lowered his head obediently, and her dainty fingers ran over the rough locks. But suddenly she drew back her hand from his hair, turned aside, and blushed to her very neck. He, with bent head, and tumbled hair that overhung his eyes, still

sat expectant. But the fingers did not resume their task. Then he straightened himself, and stared about. "What's the matter, Gesch?"

"Oh, nothing," she said, constrainedly, "shan't we be moving again?"

Yes, he was ready enough to do that, but he also wanted to know why Gesa had turned so red.

"Oh, I just thought—some one might be seeing us," she answered evasively, anxious to divert her husband's eyes that now wandered suspiciously in all directions.

It occurred to her that she could do with a little more punch. They approached the bar. Gesa drank first, holding the glass far away from her, and standing with bent body so that no droppings should fall upon her dress. Then she passed the steaming tankard to Heinrich, but just as he was about to raise it to his lips something pushed hard against him, and knocked

it out of his hand. As he stooped after the fragments, he heard the sound of a muffled laugh, and on looking up noticed a slight pucker about Gesa's mouth. She quickly recovered herself, but the mocking laughter still continued, and he now wheeled sharply round with a strangely altered expression. It was the foreman who stood sneering there behind him with his hat cocked on one side of his head. He was wearing the familiar brown overcoat; skates hung glittering over his arm; the eye-glasses were perched on his peaky nose.

"Pity the drink was spilled, eh, Gesa?" he said, confidentially, over Heinrich's head; "but don't trouble about it, child, I'll bring you another glass directly." Klefecker stared at her, then at the other. His brain seemed to stand still. How came the man to talk to her? Gesa had turned crimson, and was twisting the buttons of her dress.

“ Oh, you don't need to put on those prim airs, anyhow not with me,” laughed Jäck, impudently. “ Old friends, aren't we, Gesa ? ”

An advancing wave of people here forced him on to his feet, and sorely against the grain he found himself shut off in a remote corner. He hustled and pushed, but could not get out.

The workman remained standing as if in a trance, his eyes fixed on the spot where Jäck had stood. Gesa caught hold of his arm, and called into his ear, “ Shan't we go ? ”

He shook her off. The hot blood scorched his cheeks, his eyes even were suffused with it. “ What's he been saying ? Does he want to pick a quarrel ? I'm here, though ; I'm ready for him.”

He was gasping for breath, and scarcely intelligible. Gesa drew him to a seat and whispered something. He stared about with a threatening look, not seeming to hear. Suddenly,

with frenzied vehemence, he sprang upon a young man who sat heavily drowsing against the wall in a corner to the front of him. The sleeper's livid face was offensively relaxed, every muscle distorted, the mouth open, the head much bent aside and hanging over.

"Out with you, damned scoundrel!" shrieked Klefecker, and shook him roughly by the shoulder. The drunken man looked up stupidly, showing only the whites of his eyes; with the back of his hand he rubbed away the moisture that was oozing from his mouth; a gleam of consciousness appeared in his face, a feeble tinge of shame. He tried hard to stand, but the seat which he had had all to himself tilted up and then over, and he fell with a thud on the ground. Loud shouts of exultation greeted the fall. Klefecker wanted to drag him up.

"Let him alone, Hein," pleaded Gesa. "Why must you always

be getting up a disturbance? You don't even know him."

But Klefecker's state of wild fury was quite beyond her ken.

"I know him! he is a worthless fellow! he cheated me!" he exclaimed so loudly that his voice rang through the whole place, rising above the din of laughter and rattling of china. "He told me his mother was lying dead upstairs, and I got our master to advance him money. Confound him!"

"Please, please, Hein," implored the young woman. There was a movement among those sitting at the tables. They stood up and crowded round the workman, some taking his side, others opposing. A woman's shrill voice called out—

"His mother is lying dead; that's true enough, and he only wanted to liven himself up a bit here. Who's got anything more to say to my brother? They may just as well have it out with me."

Melia's carrotty head thrust itself up close against Klefecker; in the laughter that her own words had excited her growling tones might still be heard.

Gesa made yet one attempt to get her husband away. He gesticulated wildly, repeated his accusations, and stood as if rooted to the ground. He shook her hand off, as one would that of an importunate little child.

Then, with a troubled face, she stuffed her hands into her ears, and forced her way out of the crowd. She remembered at that moment how, even as a child, nothing ever frightened her more than the sound of loud quarrelling, and how, many a time, when her father and mother were exchanging angry words with one another, she would leave her plate of broth and slip away trembling to go and hide herself under the bed. With down-cast head and beating heart she passed out among the skaters, daring neither to listen

nor go far away. Then she paused, leaning against the outer wall of the booth, her hands clasped together, her eyes brimming over with tears of annoyance.

Suddenly a warm touch was laid upon her. She started, drew her shawl over her hands, and looked still more fixedly on the ground.

"Are you at length quit of the fellow, Gesa?" asked a whispering voice. "Give me a glance, little one." He lifted up the flushed, tear-stained face, and stroked her cheek.

She shook her head, but gave no other sign of having felt his touch.

"What fellow, Herr Jäck?" she asked, plaintively.

"Why, the one who was eating and drinking with you. You had discovered a nice little hiding-place for yourselves by the way."

"He's not one for you to speak of like that," laughed Gesa.

"You shouldn't be always running about with him, you bonny thing; he's not the sort for you."

The young woman opened wide eyes of amazement, as if he spoke in a foreign tongue; her full lips were parted in surprise. Then she seemed to divine his meaning, and laughed quietly, as one who is better informed.

"But he's my—he's my sweetheart, Herr Jäck."

"Sweetheart! well, what's sweetheart as you call it? If he's only out of the way a bit—if you can only come and skate with me."

"What an idea! he wouldn't dream of allowing it; he's just inside there."

"Actually in there?—ah, that's bad. But I thought you would have been a little kind to me to-day."

She smiled in embarrassment, not, however, displeased. Then on her ear there fell again the sound of brawling and thundering blows inside the booth. She

listened with a pained contraction of the brow.

"Is that he shouting so loud? Come, little one, come away from the place. These rough scenes aren't the thing for you. They are not to my liking either."

He had seized her hand, and now drew her away with him.

"But I must go in again now," she murmured faintly, and tried to free herself.

"Presently, presently, when they've settled down. What do you say to such a sledge as that, Gesa?"

Like a greedy child, the little creature eyed the trim vehicle with its scarlet-lined fur rug. She herself was all aglow, and looked keenly expectant as the driver threw back the cover. Jäck sprang in and held out his hand gallantly for her to follow.

Yet a moment of hesitation. Her tempter became almost impatient.

"Come along, dear child,

pretty, wilful little being!" he urged. "I don't mean to carry you off, we'll be back again soon. I only want a bit longer in the fresh air. Here there are so many people about; one gets stared at so."

He pulled her towards him, and signed to the driver.

"He knows nothing of it," he laughed, throwing his arm gently round her, and drawing the beautiful warm rug over her shoulders. "What should he know? and haven't I as good a right to kiss you as he?"

Gesa put her hand up to her cheek as if it were on fire; he had kissed her.

"No, no, not that," she exclaimed, and tried to move away; "I must be true to him, I must——"

"Really, must you, indeed?" There was a scoffing note in the words, a mocking twitch round the corners of his mouth, while his eye rested on the girl as on a safe possession, and his arm held her fast bound

“There, Gesa, I shall not kiss that off either.”

He bent her head towards him, and freed her lips only to whisper words that seemed to paralyze her.

She broke from his grasp, and uttered a muffled cry. The coachman looked round.

“Where?” he asked.

Jäck rose to speak to him, when, gathering up her dress, Gesa darted like a shot out of the sledge on to a little heap of snow.

A moment later she had regained her footing and measured the space that lay between her and the booth; behind her the foreman was shouting and scolding. She smiled and nodded back to him, running, however, as swiftly as her feet would carry her over the smooth ground towards the point where the people were collected. Heinrich Klefecker stalked with long strides and unbending knees out of the door of the booth, as though wading

through wet sand ; the coarse-looking woman vehemently jabbering and pointing to Gesa was the red-haired Melia. Malignity expressed itself in her thick-edged features.

Klefecker's head was sunk upon his breast ; he looked ashy and aged, with many a wrinkle and fold that the pale snow-light made pitilessly distinct.

" You look vexed, Hein," panted the breathless fugitive, as he now stepped up to her and seized her by the arm. She toyed with her scarf, and added in some embarrassment :

" Shan't we go at last ? "

" It has been long enough, I'm thinking," he answered. His searching glance seemed a sort of menace.

" You look at me as if we had not met this long while," she said, with an attempt at gaiety. Timidly she stroked his big, cold hand, which he in his utter abstraction did not think to withdraw.

But a moment later he tore it away and pushed hers violently aside.

She shrank back horror-struck, and lifted up the ill-treated hand to see it by the light of a street-lamp that had just been lit. Her eyes expressed pained wonderment; the lips quivered like those of a child on the edge of tears. Such a tender little hand! the foreman had so lately kissed and admired it, and now Heinrich had struck it!

Why?

Her self-pity suddenly became so great that she began to sob, and to bemoan her lot—her youth, her isolation, the wasted Sunday, the cutting wind, and her sore and aching feet.

But he heeded her not, seemed not to know that she was walking at his side.

Presently she slipped in a waggon rut; that appeared to rouse him. He helped her up, and kept hold of her arm as they went along. The strong pulsa-

tions of his heart told of an inward struggle. His eyes were dry, and brighter than usual ; on his fleshless cheeks there burned an unwonted spot of red. At times he would look intently at her, open his mouth as if to speak, then shake his head and sigh—

“ Poor little trifier ! ”

She interpreted that as an expression of tenderness, and, half comforted already, smiled and stroked him. He made neither resistance nor response. But gradually he grew weak and gentle, and unbent a little as though his heart were not full to bursting.

At length, sure of her conquest, she found courage to say—

“ Do you know, Hein, I jumped out of the sledge while it was at full speed ? ”

Instantly he froze again, let her hand drop, and answered—

“ I know.”

After a pause he added—

“ Why ? ”

"Because I saw you a way off, and didn't want you to wait," she said eagerly and in perfect innocence.

"Why did you go at all?" he remarked still more coldly.

"Oh, it was such a lovely sledge, you know, with a real tiger-skin rug, Hein. I never sat in anything like it before."

"Pity you couldn't have stopped a bit longer," he muttered between his teeth.

"Nay now, Hein, it was but ten minutes," she retorted. "You don't think I'd have let you stand waiting for me," and she looked him full in the eyes with her bright, friendly little face.

Even one to whom the heart's depths showed clearer than to Heinrich Klefecker could have read in those soft, gentle features only a conviction that she was a pattern of good conduct and wifely devotion, and felt rather aggrieved that her husband didn't give her credit for it.

"Nothing dirty can stick to

her," he murmured, and then, after a pause, and in an utterly different tone of voice, "Black-guard! we haven't done with one another yet."

"What's that you said?" she asked, looking in alarm at his clenched fist.

"Nothing, nothing, only I'm glad to be home again."

There was no light this time in the basement window. Even after the two had got into their little room, no ray from it fell on the chill outer darkness. Klefecker seated himself wearily on a chair. Gesa had gone to borrow matches of the landlady, and had apparently stayed gossiping.

Peering through the window in gloomy meditation he noticed something stir outside; a dark object seemed to be stooping down in front of the casement. He caught sight of a face at the glass pane: the white of an eye was distinctly visible. Then followed a steady rap with the

knuckles, and the words, "Gesa, are you alone?"

With a spasmodic jerk, Klefecker sprang from his chair, flew up the stairs and out to the door. Yet, though he strained his eyes to their uttermost, he could see nothing in the area; he stepped down into it, but to no purpose. Then the room grew suddenly light, every cranny exposed to view. His wife had come in carrying the lamp; she looked untroubled and very pretty. He took care to avoid startling her, climbed out of the area, and took a survey of the street which was at that time quite empty. Though many minutes had now gone by, he examined every doorway, every opening. Like a full vessel his heart was ready to burst or overflow under its burden of impotent hatred.

When he at last came back it was Gesa's turn to be displeased.

"Where was the need of your running out again?" she asked, irritably; "supper's been ready ever so long."

He made no answer. Shivering, and with teeth chattering, he seated himself in a corner.

"You're all of a tremble, Hein. What's the matter?" inquired Gesa, in a friendlier voice.

"Death is walking over my grave, Gesch," he said moodily. "First I'm in a shiver, and then I burn. Death's walking over my grave."

All night he lay like that in bed, sleepless, trembling, and ever and again uttering a low moan.

It woke Gesa out of her sleep.

"You've caught a bad cold," she said, rubbing her eyes.

"Yes, yes, a cold," he answered. "Go you to sleep, Gesch."

"Nay, Hein, I'll make you a cup of tea. I'll get up. You're like a lump of ice."

She was out of bed in a moment, and struck a light; it was half-past two. When he had swallowed the hot elder-flower mixture he grew quieter and

closed his eyes. Gesa heard a few more groans; then she dropped off into sound, heavy sleep.

When next she woke, a light was burning in the room; by the flicker of the small kitchen-lamp she saw her husband sitting at the table, ready dressed, engaged in reading a letter. He seemed quite himself.

"What are you doing there, Hein?" she cried, starting up; "what time can it be?"

He turned quickly towards the bed; in doing so he knocked the lamp off the table with his elbow. It fell in countless fragments on the floor, while the wick still continued to burn.

"Wait, wait, I'll see to it, Hein," cried Gesa to her bewildered husband. She jumped out of the bed, thrust one shoe on, and extinguished the smoking wick, but cried out directly after, "My foot! A bit of glass has gone into it."

The first grey morning light was

Melia's carroty head thrust itself up close against Klefecker; in the laughter that her own words had excited her growling tones might still be heard.

Gesa made yet one attempt to get her husband away. He gesticulated wildly, repeated his accusations, and stood as if rooted to the ground. He shook her hand off, as one would that of an importunate little child.

Then, with a troubled face, she stuffed her hands into her ears, and forced her way out of the crowd. She remembered at that moment how, even as a child, nothing ever frightened her more than the sound of loud quarrelling, and how, many a time, when her father and mother were exchanging angry words with one another, she would leave her plate of broth and slip away trembling to go and hide herself under the bed. With down-cast head and beating heart she passed out among the skaters, daring neither to listen

at every touch, and ended by pulling her foot away altogether.

A smile, that was not far from tears, stole over the old woman's hard features.

"My good child," she said, "you've not yet found out what mortals can go through. You'll know more about it when you come to be as old as I am."

The young wife looked with a scared face at the old crone's bleared, sad eyes, toothless mouth, and head bundled up in a woollen wrapper.

"I shall not be so old," she said, confidently.

"Must hang oneself up if one doesn't want to grow old, you little chicken," said the woman sharply. "Let me see your foot again."

And then turning to the husband—"A spoilt child! you're too good by half, Klefecker."

But her look of reproof was not unmixed with approval, and the pretty little woman seemed on her part to appreciate the

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"For us?" She clasped her hands together. "A few hundred thalers? Oh, Hein, aren't you glad? that's something grand! Why, we'll be able to pay all that's owing, and——"

"And you'll give up going to work," he added, in a tone of decision.

Her countenance quickly fell.

"My goodness, Hein, what would you have me be doing here all day long?"

"What other women do," he said curtly.

"But others have got money; we haven't anything." As though defying contradiction she looked about the shabby room, and pointed with her finger to the broken, uneven floor.

"Fancy sitting here by oneself; it would be enough to make one's lips grow together," she muttered.

Heinrich laid his hand on her shoulder, saying in accents of desperation: "I must go; first to our place, then to Heide. It may

be a few days before I am back. Your foot's bad ; stop at home, don't go to the works till I get home. Promise me that, Gesch!" A choking sound as of swallowed tears made his voice husky.

"If it only doesn't last too long," she answered quickly.

"And suppose he should come here——" he stuttered.

She burst out laughing. "He'll take good care not to do that!"

But the anxious face seemed suddenly to soften her.

"Good luck to you, Hein," she said more gently; "perhaps you'll get the money straight away."

"Maybe."

Thus they parted.

Hardly was he off when some vague impulse drew his young wife to the window to take another look at him. She limped painfully across the room, and, mindless of her half-clad state, threw open the window and looked out. He was just passing by.

"Hein, how's your cold? I forgot to ask," she called.

“Oh, ah, the cold,” he responded, with a hasty glance down; then he walked on.

She followed him with her eyes, and closed the window slowly, though she shivered in her little night-jacket. But an hour later she was eagerly chatting and knitting in her landlady's kitchen. The exciting legacy, and all that was to be done with the money, afforded an inexhaustible fund for conversation. It gratified Gesa to think how this sudden stroke of luck would raise her in the esteem of the old woman, who had always treated her like a silly child. The topic of the inheritance lasted over the next day, and then it was merged in another, no whit less weighty and important—weighty and important not only to the two women, but to the whole population of the district and beyond.

The foreman, Leopold Jäck, had disappeared.

On the Monday he had as

usual left the printing-works at dinner-time, probably the last to leave, for no one had seen him go out ; he had been there all the forenoon, and nothing peculiar had been noticed about him. In the afternoon he was absent, a circumstance which had been known now and again to occur on a Monday. It was noted disapprovingly by the head of the firm, but without further result. When, however, Tuesday came and he was still missing, Ribe, the old factotum with the crippled arm, was sent at twelve o'clock to his lodging. Ribe found the door locked, and none of the people of the house at home. Upon this, information was carried to the police. In the name of the law they forced open the door, of which he appeared to have carried off the key, and—the place was found empty. Not cleared out exactly, but yet deserted. The bed in the sometime photographer's dark room within was disordered ; the landlady

have overlooked the three gold pieces and the smaller coin. But the watch had also been left. It lay among the flower-pots, which stood upon a half-torn, pulpy love-letter. The case was open, the key close by, as if it had been laid there just after being used. The watch had stopped at nine, but began ticking again when the official touched it. Its stoppage was apparently a result of the cold, and the only question was, Why did your owner not take you with him? No reason for a sudden departure could be assigned. Telegraphic messages were nevertheless despatched in all directions, first to Pirna where an uncle of Jäck's was living. There was a letter sticking in a coat pocket, by means of which his address became known.

The people of the house were carefully watched, and inquiries set up (futile in their results) at the drinking and dancing saloons. He was known everywhere, this somewhat puffed-up young man,

who spoke with the accent of Saxony, affected the dandy, was a patron of shop-keepers, and sworn devotee of the fair sex. It was even ascertained at which place of amusement he had stayed dancing till midnight on Sunday, but at that point the traces of him disappeared. From his native town there arrived a bulky letter written by his uncle, who, with plaintive diffuseness, made it known not only that his nephew was not at Pirna, but, further, that no news of him had reached his belongings for the last two months and that his *fiancée* declared she would have nothing more to do with him unless he speedily turned over a new leaf.

In conclusion, he solemnly charged "the wealthy and worthy town of Hamburg" to restore his nephew and intending son-in-law. Among the people of the interior, he said, Hamburg had unfortunately acquired the reputation of a very depraved

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trouble and help, and laughed as the other took her departure with the sarcastically encouraging words, "Now you may run and dance."

Gesa tried to stand, but fell back with a cry of pain.

"Nay, Hein, I can't stand on it."

Her husband seemed almost pleased.

"No matter, Gesch. There'll be no going to the works to-day, and it's just as well. I'll step on and let them know." Then after a pause—"See here, I've had a long letter. I'll need to be off to Heide this afternoon—they have written to me about the will. I was in doubt at first—now I can go," he added, with a sigh and a suspicious look in the direction of the window.

"The will?" repeated Gesa, wondering; she seemed to have heard only that single word.

"About my uncle Asmus, who died at Harwst; it's likely a matter of a few hundred thalers."

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On the Monday he had as

usual left the printing-works at dinner-time, probably the last to leave, for no one had seen him go out ; he had been there all the forenoon, and nothing peculiar had been noticed about him. In the afternoon he was absent, a circumstance which had been known now and again to occur on a Monday. It was noted disapprovingly by the head of the firm, but without further result. When, however, Tuesday came and he was still missing, Ribe, the old factotum with the crippled arm, was sent at twelve o'clock to his lodging. Ribe found the door locked, and none of the people of the house at home. Upon this, information was carried to the police. In the name of the law they forced open the door, of which he appeared to have carried off the key, and—the place was found empty. Not cleared out exactly, but yet deserted. The bed in the sometime photographer's dark room within was disordered ; the landlady

stated that the gentleman had come home at a late hour on Sunday night, and had left his lodging early on Monday morning without her seeing him. As the key was not left sticking in the door, she was unable to enter, which had happened on previous occasions. The gentleman had treated her in a very high-and-mighty fashion; he was an ill one to find fault with. She had supposed that he would call when he came home if he wanted his bed making. Then, as he didn't turn up on the Tuesday morning, she told her husband about it—he also talked about “reporting” the matter; wanted, however, to wait a day or two; didn't want to cause annoyance to the gentleman, who might perhaps be coming back before long; his lodgings (bother take them!) were in any case empty for the most part; and one didn't want to be calling in the police if it could be helped. On its being pointed out to her that this was

a suspicious utterance, she became very indignant. She had a number of children, and her husband was a postman, and where was she to find time to run at the heels of a man who went gadding about every night, and gave his washing out to strangers, just as if she didn't know how to iron his rubbish.

With that she flung open his chest of drawers, and disclosed a wild confusion of used and unused linen, remains of cake, bright-coloured neckties, and ointment boxes; a few pieces of loose money were also tossing about. The official condemned her high-handed conduct; then he proceeded to seal up the chest of drawers, wardrobe, and a half-broken trunk filled with worn-out socks and tattered novels. The place looked almost as if its tenant had run away. But were that the case, would he not have taken his money with him? To be sure there was not much of it, —with his untidy ways he might



have overlooked the three gold pieces and the smaller coin. But the watch had also been left. It lay among the flower-pots, which stood upon a half-torn, pulpy love-letter. The case was open, the key close by, as if it had been laid there just after being used. The watch had stopped at nine, but began ticking again when the official touched it. Its stoppage was apparently a result of the cold, and the only question was, Why did your owner not take you with him? No reason for a sudden departure could be assigned. Telegraphic messages were nevertheless despatched in all directions, first to Pirna where an uncle of Jäck's was living. There was a letter sticking in a coat pocket, by means of which his address became known.

The people of the house were carefully watched, and inquiries set up (futile in their results) at the drinking and dancing saloons. He was known everywhere, this somewhat puffed-up young man,

who spoke with the accent of Saxony, affected the dandy, was a patron of shop-keepers, and a sworn devotee of the fair sex. It was even ascertained at which place of amusement he had stayed dancing till midnight on Sunday, but at that point the traces of him disappeared. From his native town there arrived a bulky letter written by his uncle, who, with plaintive diffuseness, made it known not only that his nephew was not at Pirna, but, further, that no news of him had reached his belongings for the last two months, and that his *fiancée* declared she would have nothing more to do with him unless he speedily turned over a new leaf.

In conclusion, he solemnly charged "the wealthy and worthy town of Hamburg" to restore his nephew and intending son-in-law. Among the people of the interior, he said, Hamburg had unfortunately acquired the reputation of a very depraved

town—he had never been willing to admit such a charge, as his own work had at one time lain in the Borgesch; but for Leopold Jäck Hamburg was undoubtedly answerable and would have to account.

And now every day there appeared paragraphs headed “Outrage or accident?” The people of the lodging-house were detained in custody for a while, but soon dismissed, and the search was transferred from living beings to the district canals, large and small. Their name, in truth, is legion, not to mention the ponds, streamlets, and ditches. But all in vain: no answer was forthcoming—the foreman had disappeared beyond recall.

Disappeared! an uncanny word. It signifies “perished,” “dead,” but to it is superadded a haunting uncertainty—the horror of doubt. A deathlike shadow seemed to rest on the already winter-stricken, cheerless region of the Hammerbrook.

be a few days before I am back. Your foot's bad ; stop at home, don't go to the works till I get home. Promise me that, Gesch!" A choking sound as of swallowed tears made his voice husky.

"If it only doesn't last too long," she answered quickly.

"And suppose he should come here——" he stuttered.

She burst out laughing. "He'll take good care not to do that!"

But the anxious face seemed suddenly to soften her.


"Good luck to you, Hein," she said more gently ; "perhaps you'll get the money straight away."

"Maybe."

Thus they parted.

Hardly was he off when some vague impulse drew his young wife to the window to take another look at him. She limped painfully across the room, and, mindless of her half-clad state, threw open the window and looked out. He was just passing by.

"Hein, how's your cold? I forgot to ask." she called.



“Oh, ah, the cold,” he responded, with a hasty glance down; then he walked on.

She followed him with her eyes, and closed the window slowly, though she shivered in her little night-jacket. But an hour later she was eagerly chatting and knitting in her landlady's kitchen. The exciting legacy, and all that was to be done with the money, afforded an inexhaustible fund for conversation. It gratified Gesa to think how this sudden stroke of luck would raise her in the esteem of the old woman, who had always treated her like a silly child. The topic of the inheritance lasted over the next day, and then it was merged in another, no whit less weighty and important—weighty and important not only to the two women, but to the whole population of the district and beyond.

The foreman, Leopold Jäck, had disappeared.

On the Monday he had as

you'll see better that way," and he held out his strong arms as he spoke. But this recalled her to herself. She wiped her eyes, and slowly retraced her steps along the sodden streets.

Once she gave a cry and sprang aside, shuddering. She had felt a hand on her shoulder, and, turning round, had a vision of the vanished foreman, who approached her, motionless and ashy-grey, but with a red scar upon his brow. Horror-struck, she pulled her kerchief over her eyes, then was irresistibly drawn to take yet another look. It was nothing more than a tree that she had seen. The red reflection upon it came from a street-lamp. Her knees trembled as she ran on, and the green, blue, and red lights of the Lübeck Station danced before her eyes.

Sometimes, as if a picture had been flashed across her sight, she would see Heinrich sitting in the little room off the passage, where his huge limbs had hardly space

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and light. What might it be? He pushed the bed into the middle of the room, squeezed himself round it up to the wall, and came against an old flower-patterned chintz curtain half concealing the corner, out of which a human face confronted him. He retreated, knit his brow, and stretched forth his hand. It struck against cold glass. He drew a deep breath—only a mirror! But could that be his own face? That pinched and livid face, with the disordered hair, the staring eyes? And what sort of mark was that just under the chin, dividing the head from the body? No, no, that was not he: that was the murderer awaiting the dawn of day—his last—behind the barred windows in the prison yonder. How came he to be reflected in this mirror?

He pulled out his blue pocket-handkerchief, and began to rub the glass, hurriedly, ever quicker; he felt it grow warm under his

touch ; yet the image with the cut throat did not vanish, but repeated all his movements.

It was his own face in very truth : thus must he appear when——

He thrust the curtain quickly over the mirror, but the cord that held it was rotten and broke in his rough hand. Its dusty folds fell to the ground ; and there, life-size, behind it stood the terrible being with the mutilated throat—"just as big and straight a one as you !" What availed it that he now distinctly perceived the crack in the broken glass ? What availed it for him with clumsy haste to try and turn it round and lean it against the wall ? The image followed him, as, with shaking limbs, he once more squeezed himself round between bed and wall—his eyes beheld it, no matter how closely he pressed his hands against them.

He was young and strong. He clenched his teeth, uncovered his eyes, and said firmly—

“ I am no burglar. What has he to do with me ? ”

He smoothed his forehead as one does in great fatigue. “ Have I maybe dreamt it ? Perhaps it’s not true. And to-morrow I’ll wake up and go to my Gesche, and she knows nothing of it all ; and he’ll be going out of his door like on other days, with his damned barber’s block get-up, and his eye-glass, and will be telling her that she’ll still be good enough for me, even if——”

He sprang up, clenched his fist, and ran to and fro with re-echoing tread. “ Nay, nay ! not that ! I’d need to kill him over again if it were that.”

He looked round, but the shy and frightened expression was no longer on his face, though he had spoken the words out loud. It seemed as if he knew fear no more. He could even eat and drink, and then lean back in the chair to enjoy for awhile the still and dreamless sleep of a happy mortal. Hours of it forsooth.

The sound of bells awoke him—the tower bells; they penetrated him as though a heavy hammer had beat the strokes on his head.

Five o'clock! five o'clock! Yet one hour of life. For whom then? For him? No, not him—the murderer behind yonder wall.

“What concern is he of mine?” he whispered, his lips twitching.

He felt in his pocket, half unconsciously drew some small object from it, and turned it about in the light of the expiring lamp. A flat button, brown coloured, a thread hanging to it, and a little tag of brown cloth. The coat had also been brown. An odious aggressive tobacco shade, such as no other man thought of wearing. That was how he had at once recognized him on that ill-starred Monday, when he came to him at the factory and inquired after “pretty Fraülein Gesa.” And the hypocritical grimace with which he catechised him! Was he really meaning to do

honestly by the lassie? And when he had thundered out: "She is my wife!" what an impudent laugh of scorn the fellow had vented upon him! And then—then it had happened. He had seized him by that self-same button and flung him on the ground, and the button remained in his hand, he knew not how—lay afterwards in his pocket, by what accident he could not tell. The button knew the whole story; it must not be left there any longer. Quick! fresh wood upon the fire, and coals! coals! till it crackled and blazed—a regular witches' fire—and in with the betrayer, before its dumb lips could be opened! It glowed awhile, a clear round disc. Then the bony substance turned to ashy dust, and lost itself on the gleaming hearth. No fear of seeing that again. But as he turned round, there was something so strange about the bed, that straight, square bed. Was it not a tank? Like the sort

that one makes borax in? One like the——

He had to go and feel it. Right enough—soft cushions that yielded to pressure—everything dry and warm. And yet when he moved back—no bed, but a cauldron, filled with sulphuric acid—and what else in it besides?

He uttered a cry,—the cauldron had burst, broken in two pieces. A bony hand stretched itself out to him,—a cleft skull stared above the rim—yes, the poker had lain so conveniently to hand!

The lamp went out; he was in the dark amid a ghostly throng. Again three bell peals: it's a quarter to six. He'll be dressed by now—must have eaten his last meal. What may he be thinking about? Will he perchance pray? Then, mechanically, Klefecker began repeating: "Our Father which art in heaven," till he reached the point: "And forgive us our trespasses." ——"Nay, nay, I cannot," he

groaned in anguish; "not forgive him: the Almighty could never ask that much."

Then he packed up his things, all in the dark, seized his cap, and ran out of the house before six had struck. He pushed the key under the front door and hurried forth in the black winter morning through the empty streets to the Hammerbrook, and thence to Bullerhude beyond. Before he quite knew what he was about, he found himself standing in the little basement room before the bed on which Gesa still lay sleeping. He saw in the dusk the gleam of her white neck and the arm that hung over the edge of the quilt. A groan escaping him close above her ear awoke her.

"Hein, is it you?" she cried, starting up. Her arms were about him in a moment; she caught his feverish, bony face and drew it down upon the pillow. But he straightened himself without kissing her.

“Gesche, I’m off, I can’t stop!”

“Away from me?”

“Yes, yes!”

“Where?”

“Don’t know.”

“Why?”

“I did it, Gesche; I did it!” he wailed, thrusting his tearful face into her bosom.

“Oh, Hein! oh, my God!” She did not relax her hold of him, but she pressed her fingernails into the tender flesh of her hands. “What are you going to do? What? What?”

“Don’t know! Go to Cuxhaven—America.”

“Ah! why did you come back?”

“I wanted to see you once more.”

He pressed her to him still more closely, more vehemently.

“My child! my Gesch! Melia’s bent on getting hold of me! I think she has a notion of something, and she wants to squeeze money out of me; she

told me so when I got back yesterday. I must just go, and I don't know how to do it."

She wiped away her tears with her hands, and faltered—

"I'll follow—when I—when I've got my things on."

"Ah, Gesche! but where?"

"Wherever you go."

"But, Gesch, you'll never find me."

"No fear, I'll find you. Hein! Hein! you've never done it!"

"He'll do for me yet; see if he don't," he said, darkly.

At the door he asked again, hesitatingly—

"And you, Gesch?"

"I'm coming."

"Going to follow me?"

"Yes, Hein."

"Cuxhaven?"

"Yes, Hein, wherever you go." —

He came hastily back to the bed.

"Oh, Gesche, the money! I'm that distracted. I did it up in two bundles at Heide."

He pulled a small package out of his breast-pocket.

"No one knows; there's five hundred marks—my inheritance."

"Yes, but be off now—be off." She pushed him from her. "I—I—scarce know where I am." She hid her burning tears in the pillow.

Now whither? Away, far, far! on board ship and away! It was still dark in the streets, and he went on easily, though he instinctively avoided the direct road which must have taken him past the two contiguous factories. Mechanically he moved in the direction of the quays of the harbour. In his hands he carried his scanty luggage; his pocket contained the half of his inheritance. At the Benloover station he halted. It occurred to him to take the train at this point and not to leave it before getting to Cuxhaven. It must be just the right time, seven had that minute struck; foot-passengers and vehicles were hastening towards the entrance.


"Are you taking the train?"

asked a passing official, who, as he hurried by, scanned him with searching glance.

Involuntarily Klefecker shook his head ; no, no, he had no such intention ; the thought of the many people who might all look at him as this man had just now done aroused fear within him.

“ This way to the Elbe Bridge and Harburg,” he saw written up, and turned without further consideration along the empty road.

Here at last was solitude if not quiet. The north-westerly blast which had for days been raging met him with its shrill whistle on the low, narrow Elbe embankment where there was nothing to break its force. He had sometimes been here on summer and autumn days when the breeze is heavy with the scent of lush grass, which it will often waft miles down stream, conjuring up for sea-worn travellers a familiar vision of green pastures and placid marshland



ws that wander with swaying it along. But that was "before." Everything was "before." now seemed to him as though on this journey he had given nself into the power of a ousand devils who were tugging at his hat and pulling his ir about his face, who tore his in with sharp nails, filled his es with blinding ice-dust, his rs with hissing shrieks. But resisting these wild onslaughts found his youth and vigour ce again. He trod firmly as fore, ere he had known fear, rried his hat, which would not ck upon his head, stiffened his ees, and fought his way step step till he reached the Elbe idge. Seen from a distance, movement in it had been parent. It had looked even angely quiescent out there, shed by the thundering waves, th white, sharp-winged sea-lls—those genii of the storm—ing overhead. But when Kleker stepped upon it, it was

more like setting foot upon a tempest-beaten vessel with crack-
ing sails, creaking cordage,
groaning planks. Giddiness
overpowered his senses, and
the peculiar rhythm of the
storm, the pulsating breath
that throbbed by turns quick
and slow, seemed to make one
with the beating of his heart.
The shrill, short whistle of a
passing engine dispelled the
cloud that had darkened his
mind. Separated only by a
railing, the red-eyed, spark-
emitting, black-winged monster
tore past him like a conquered
thing fleeing from the angry
waters.

The lonely fugitive trembled
as he again stepped forth from
behind one of the massive
pillars of the bridge. Daylight
brought everything back to him;
the horror of the night, the dread
of strange faces, each of which
might be that of a foe. His
guilt hung upon him like a sack
of nauseous refuse, on him whose

life had hitherto been pure. He yearned, nay, even still hoped, to find a spot on earth where he should rid himself of the vile burden. "Where no one knows me! Where no one knows me!" If he could only get to Harburg!

At Wilhelmsburg he fell in with some workpeople, among them a young fellow and a girl. She hung on her companion's arm; the wind blew her hither and thither, and they both laughed lustily. Klefecker turned his head towards them, and followed them with his eyes. How Gesche used to laugh! But now—no more of that—if her husband—A sense that something had for ever vanished, even though he should safely get "where no one knew him," made his eyes dim.

On the second bridge, just before Harburg, giddiness and weariness once more overcame him. The klirr and grating of the huge ice-blocks which the storm was driving upon one

another in self-destroying combat, mingled with the throb of his excited brain. His feet no longer moved, the bundle fell from his grasp, and the flash and glitter of the water in between the swaying iron props of the bridge confused his sight. With closed eyes he squatted down against a pillar. But like a sleeper who becomes restless on being looked at, he sprang up under the sudden gaze of a pair of penetrating eyes. There stood the very official who had asked him at the Benlooer station whether he were bound for Hamburg. He now made no remark, but seemed to be wondering what had led this man to do the whole road on foot rather than spend a few coppers and save himself hours of tramping in such weather. And when the wanderer again set forth he watched him, and then followed slowly behind him to the town. He saw him enter a baker's shop, and as he passed leisurely

looked through the window, studied the distressed, haggard, timid face as though wanting to get it by heart.

Klefecker stood like a block of wood at the counter among the men and servant-girls, whose counter was of broken panes of glass, fallen bricks, uprooted trees, and overturned clothes-horses. Lower down, towards the haven, things were said to be in an even sorrier plight. When at length it came to his turn to be supplied with bread, a gruff voice suddenly called out to the ranks of the talkers: "Bless me! Klefecker, where were you sprung from?"

It was as if some one had dealt him a blow on the head. Until he perceived that nobody was startled or took more notice of him than before, and that all unconcernedly the baker's boy handed him his white bread over the counter, could he muster courage to glance sideways in the direction from which the voice

had issued. A tall, thin woman, sharp-featured, and very clean in her attire despite the inclement weather, pressed forward to greet him. A sturdy little boy was clinging to her apron.

"Well, don't you know me, then?" she asked him, somewhat sharply, for he in his agitation had stared at her without a sign of recognition. "Come along with us, Klefecker, there's such a crowd here."

She made him come out with her into the street, and it being, as she declared, too windy there to stand upright, she forced him into a low, narrow doorway to continue the talk which his advent, as if the answer to a call, had started.

"Yes, tell Gesche—how is she, by the way?—that we moved over to Harburg last Saturday. My husband found he could earn more here than at Elsfleth, and I like it better, it's more lively. Does Gesche dance as much as ever? You shouldn't allow it,

I got regularly pale with that eternal dancing. Well, to be sure when folks are young! but now I've a clog tied to my leg—nay, three, four clogs; that husband of mine, and the young 'uns!" She laughed and pressed the little one against her apron. "That's our eldest, six year old; he's a handful, I can tell you. Aren't you now?" The lad grinned venturesomely out of the folds of her skirt, and rapped upon his boots.

"Yes, yes, he wears top-boots," said the woman, "and they're wet every night. I have to stand one on the broom-handle, and the other on the mop-handle so that they may get dry again by next day. Such a pickle as he is! He's broken a whole pane of glass at our neighbour's with his snow-balling; the glazier's just been there to set another in." She shook her fist at the culprit, and wiped his red, resisting nose. Then she whispered: "But he

brings me every farthing he gets given him, and it isn't all children as does that. They will take fancies into their heads sometimes, and think they'll buy sweeties or gooseberries. But with him no such thing. And he knows that a sixpence is worth more than one penny and two pennies, though he's only a small chap and hasn't much sense yet; how should he at six years? But he's a little fatty, isn't he?" She gave him a good hug, at which he puckered up his face. "Such a round little head, and such plump little shoulders, such a strong fellow, isn't he?"

Up to this point there had been no call on Klefecker to speak, but impatience was visibly written on his face. Even the easy-going, garrulous woman could not fail to perceive it.

"Get on, Fritz; give Uncle Hein your hand, the right hand, you know, the best one;" and smiles of pleased anticipation

beamed all over her sharp-edged, white face. She pushed the boy forward, but as quickly pulled him back again. "Where have you been running to now? Have you been playing in the gutter again, you filthy* boy!" She smacked his dirty little fist. "You can't give uncle a hand like that; it's not clean!"

The little one was quick to hide his abashed face in his mother's skirt; the unhappy man had also drawn back his hand; it too was unclean, but ah! in a very different fashion.

He looked so sad just then; his muttered speech about having to go and no more time to spare came with so strange an accent that in sudden misgiving the quick-witted woman caught him by the sleeve.

"Where are you off to, then? Nothing amiss, is there? Not my sister? not Gesche? you're never meaning to run away? not going to run away to America and desert her?"

Her voice grew ever louder and more appealing, her eyes ever more piercingly bright.

"Nay, nay," he said, shaking his head violently; but he was unversed in lying. His thin face flushed crimson. "I've business to see after, I must go back to the station."

"So-phy! are you to be all day getting that black bread?" was heard from across the street.

The woman caught the sound. "My husband's on the watch for me at the door yonder—look, over there; we've a bit of garden and a rabbit hutch; my husband has done it all up—if you'll only come in for a minute. My second boy's just turned three, three year old—Ludje, you know."

"Good-bye," said the fugitive, almost roughly, endeavouring to get quit of her.

"Oh, I'm going that way," answered she, offended, yet not desisting; "it's along here to the station. That is, if you're

really going to the station." She looked at him suspiciously: then of a sudden in a kindly voice, "Hein, if you've been having trouble with Gesche—there's no harm in the girl, she's only light-headed and childish, but she's fond enough of you, my lad, I know that much; why else should she have taken you? It wasn't exactly for your looks"—she eyed him unceremoniously from top to toe—"and it wasn't for your money either, for you've got none; as for your business—my man has a better than that, as shoemaker. I've got him always in the house that way, under my own eye, and it's best for a man to be looked after. For any man!" She clapped him on the shoulder. "Get you home, and make it up with Gesche. And come out some Sunday afternoon; we're always to be found then, and I'll show you my boy, him as is my youngest."

She was off at length. Kle-

fecker had insisted on taking a cross-road. But he dared not look round lest she should come back. A gnawing, consuming pain, of which he was sensible all over his body, though at no one point in particular, added itself to his dread of being pursued. The foul, uncanny burden that weighed him down grew heavier at every step.

"Away! away! where no one knows me," he thought again; but then he seemed to see Gesa searching for him, and his feet turned to go back and meet her.

Now at length he reached the station. He took a fourth-class ticket to Cuxhaven, and sat down in the cold waiting-hall with its jingling windows to eat his dry bread. Then it was time to take his place. In the silent company of three peasants with pipes alight, and in the sounding presence of the ever-rising storm and nearing ocean, the hours went by as in a heavy dream. At three o'clock the guard called

into the carriage : " Cuxhaven : all change ! " The train stopped at the harbour, where the wind was so strong that passengers found the mere act of getting out an exercise of strength. It had been even worse the night before—broken tiles and lopped boughs lay on the causeway; sand and seaweed had been swept and heaped together on steps and in corners, to be every moment swirled round afresh and scattered far and wide. The chimney of a big mill fell down towards morning, playing havoc with the boats in the adjacent wharf. The street was barred at that point, and huge fragments of the chimney still lay on the ground, while others were being carted off. For the first time Klefecker beheld the arid coast that is washed by the German Ocean. The harbour seemed small after that of Hamburg, but the might of the storm exceeded all that he had known. One could fancy that it filled the white-

winged sailing-boats with independent life and power of distant flight. And look there to the left, at the base of the creaking, swaying lighthouse, where the birds fly screeching round! Are they really water, those black, impenetrable hills that rise up as if to engulf earth and shatter heaven? A valley now where a mountain has just been, and again a mountain where a valley.

It was difficult to stand looking and keep one's balance; it was hard to remember that the ground stood firm. The towns—people were planted at corners of walls and in doorways, holding fast by one hand, and staring with dizzy gaze through screens of glass. Voices lost themselves in the overpowering roar. All eyes were turned to a common point; one thought filled every heart. Each face spoke dread of a terrible living monster that bellowed for prey. Darker even than the turbid water stood the

bulwark of the *Old Love* like the decaying skeleton of a whale. The sky changed as incessantly as the sea. It grew by turns light and dark, and was filled with that melancholy yellow vapour which the northern sea-god puffs from his pipe. Now and again the report of a gun would rend the organ notes of the tempest, or the fog-horn's anxious cry sound its warning across the waves.

The fugitive had to feel his way back into the streets along the walls of the houses. Girls and women walked in squads to keep themselves from being blown over, and cast anxious looks up at the housetops. A sudden blast having driven him and a sailor accidentally into a corner together, he plucked up courage to ask whether any ship would be leaving that day. Yes, but only one, a coaling-vessel bound for Hull. The captain had just gone into the tavern under; he was the person to quire of.

Klefecker's spirits rose bird-like. He stepped into the tavern, which at that moment sheltered but a single guest. The captain, a thick-set, foreign-looking man sat in front of a steaming dish of cabbage, ever and anon pushing aside his strong black beard to keep it clear of his plate. Klefecker felt suddenly hungry; he ordered something warm to be brought, and then explained his wishes.

Yes, the captain had room for one passenger, scarcely for two, but perhaps it could be managed. He had been meaning to start yesterday; the storm, however, had hindered him. He must see how things were by evening—no means of fixing a definite time while the weather kept as it was.

Poor comfort for one under whose feet the ground was on fire!

The landlady brought him his plate of mutton and cabbage according to orders. It had an appetizing fragrance, but food

seemed to choke him. The captain got up, and pushed the newspaper towards him as he went out. His eyes straightway fell upon a large-type notice covering half a page :

“Two thousand marks reward to such person as will bring me trustworthy information respecting the whereabouts of my nephew, the engineer, Leopold Jäck, who disappeared February 28th of this year.

“KASPAR DOGEL (*Rentier*),
“PIRNA IN SAXONY.”

Every object swam before his confused sight : his face grew cold. Then of a sudden some one behind him began reading the notice aloud. If only he had not turned his head ! But it was as if an unseen force had pulled it round, and his eyes met those of the dock official who was holding the paper, and had just read out the announcement to the landlady.

"They're still on the look-out for him," he said, striking the printed page with the flat of his hand.

"I suppose he's been robbing the till that they're so bent on getting him," said the landlady, sleepily.

"Nay, that's not true!" cried a quick, hoarse voice that stopped abruptly. Who had asked him? With a crimson face Klefecker bent over his cold plate; he made a show of eating, but could swallow nothing. The official, keenly alert, drew near him.

"You know him, then, personally?" he asked carelessly, but his eyes spoke volumes.

"Who?"

"The man who's disappeared, Jäck?"

"Nay, I don't know him." His tone was fairly composed, but his voice trembled somewhat.

The official took a seat opposite him, and looked him calmly in the face.

"But you stated just now——"

"I only said what I've read."

This time the words came more lightly from his lips.

"You are meaning to cross?"
threw in the other.

"Yes, I think so."

"It's easier from Hamburg,"
pursued his inquisitor, drawing off his thick gloves the better to hold the glass of grog that stood steaming before him.

"You've made a great round-about." The stiff, reddish moustache twitched imperceptibly, causing the short tips to stand erect. The red stripes above the eyes—eyebrows there were none—contracted watchfully; even the big ears were pricked up a little to await the reply.

But there came no reply. The fugitive remained silent, realizing his utter helplessness; he measured the distance between himself and the door like a captured animal, and felt in his pocket for his knife.

The official leaned quietly back in his chair.

"Your papers are in order, I presume? When one is setting out on such a journey——"

Klefecker let go the knife, and dived down after his pocket-book; everything was there. When claiming his inheritance those papers had given him no end of running about. His trade-book alone had been left behind at the works.

The official noted his readiness with a surprise which he could scarcely conceal.

"That'll do; time enough before sailing; Captain Hammer won't be starting to-day," he said, with a sideway glance; "and for the matter of that I suppose you're in no particular hurry." The expected gesture of terror did not fail. The official looked almost grateful.

"But maybe you are in a hurry to get away?" he resumed, with an air of goodwill.

Klefecker sprang up, gathered his things together, and moved to the bar to settle his account.

He must have attacked the official with his knife had he stayed a moment longer. And within him burned the resolve that though all should be discovered, and he arrested, his undoing should not be brought about by this man, nor through his agency.

His tormentor, too, had risen.

“If you are really bent on going, I shall beg for a sight of your papers,” he said, amused at his own exceeding courtesy.

At that moment the door was hurriedly torn open. A half-grown lad burst in.

“Mother, a boat’s out there in front of the *Old Love*; it’s like to go to pieces any moment!”

He left the door open behind him, and rushed out. The official cast a short, steady glance at Klefecker, then he too ran off; Klefecker followed; the landlady snatched up an American-cloth table cover, bundled herself in it, and waddled after the men. People were all hastening in one

direction, towards the lighthouse. Lamps already burned there, but their quiet red flame flickered only in broken intermittent sparks above the heaving mountains and valleys. The storm had abated somewhat, so that at a pinch one could keep one's footing; the roar of the sea, however, still prevented the people from making their voices heard.

They stood in rows and clusters with upraised arms. Vain were their struggles to exchange words with one another; but the agitated faces of old men, the scared looks of women, the children whose sobs and cries rose above the awe-inspiring tumult—the meaning of all this was clear enough.

Klefecker pushed his way into a close-packed group. Captain Hammer was also there, who handed him a telescope and guided his hand to the right spot.

Yes, he saw it, not far off.

Like a sheet of white paper, by turns tossed up and down, the boat with outspread sail bounded to the old bulwark. How came it to be stranded there? Why were the sails not lowered?

"That must be Jan Stubbe," he heard a man shout into the ear of another.

"Yes, that's he!"

"If only it comes right!"

"No chance of it, sure as I stand here."

A loud cry rang from the beach. The frenzied figure, flinging itself to and fro upon the deck, had now at last half strapped the sail when the blast wrenched it from his exhausted or inexperienced hands, beat against the slackened canvas, and sent the boat wildly spinning round.

"He is down again!" was the cry.

"That's not him; that's only his boy; he's a big upright fellow is Jan."

"I tell you it's him."

"And I tell you Jan Stubbe is

not on board at all ; that's what I say."

A fresh cry interrupted their dispute ; the mast had gone to pieces ; the sail was half hanging in the water ; the whirling of the boat had stopped, it was leaning on its side.

A man standing by Klefecker called out :

"We must fetch him in, my lads : who's ready to go ?"

"He's down," was the counter-cry.

"It's but the boy," shouted a third.

The old fisherman who had first spoken began again ; "And even if it were Jan Stubbe himself, is the man to be let to drown before our very eyes ?"

The withered brown face of the speaker looked in earnest confidence from one to the other.

"Haven't all of you been in straits some time of your lives ? Who's here can say no ?"

The bright fearless eyes fell upon Klefecker, the voice of ur-

that exhortation went to his heart. Then it seemed to him though the awful burden were laid from his shoulders. A sense of things righting themselves passed through his whole body. He threw the satchel, which he was still carrying, to the bystanders.

"Ready," he cried, with the voice of a stentor.

Not another word, but all understood. In the twinkling of an eye there were mustered four men, seven men all of them, strong men with faces of fixed purpose like the man who had first spoken. As the fecker, their fifth man, ran along the landing-stage, sprang into the boat, seized the oar, and with might and main struck into the water that resisted like stubborn lead, a gleam spread his face; fresh life came to him.

"After all, one may sometimes be mistaken," said the harbour official to the landlady. "I had thought—and now look how the boat pulls."

It was sore work battling in the fragile bark against storm and flood. With aching arms and sweating brows, speechless, they plied their oars, gazing far beyond towards the hard-pressed fishing boat, at that moment not even to be seen. An exact knowledge of the coast guided them. In the thick of the fight, while every nerve was strained to its extreme limit, upon the fugitive there broke suddenly, as if framed in a picture, the image of one who came speeding towards him. She was far distant, very far ; yet he recognized the blonde hair and short footsteps, and saw her garments flutter in the wind.

Then she walked slowly, ever more slowly, a dreary way. Her tear-stained eyes were lifted to his, not in reproach, but helplessly, despairingly. He could not bear that look, and raised his oar to screen himself. The vision melted away as a sharp knife-like cry pierced through the howling of the storm. They

were at the goal ; they had reached the boat. It was filling visibly with water ; a half lifeless boy clung to the second mast. No hope of saving him by signal or call ; he must be fetched. At length they brought their yawl alongside of the other boat. The old fisherman stepped across, tore free the rigid hands, and held the boy against his body. Klefecker let go the edge of the other boat on which he had drawn himself erect, and stood unsupported, though the loosened sail kept lashing his face furiously the while. Then he caught the shipwrecked lad and laid him safely down. One of the men carrying a big sailor's knife wanted to pass across him. Klefecker perceived his intention, took the knife from his hand, and made sign that he himself would step over and cut down the second mast. The boat might then perhaps yet be saved. The old man was still on board. With his whole strength Klefecker

drove in the knife and sprang swiftly backwards. But the falling mast with its clinging canvas struck him, despite his rapid movement. It flung him overboard and far away. A rope was promptly thrown out to him by the old man. He rose to the surface some way off, his hands grasping the mast; the rope slipped over it hither and thither, he made no effort to seize it. They called and shouted, but in vain. Then his hand was seen to relax its grasp, and over him closed the merciful waters that had taken from him his grievous burden.



OLD-FASHIONED FOLK.







OLD-FASHIONED FOLK.

WHEN peas grow cheap, and their scent fills the air; when barrows of strawberries and cherries throng the streets; when noon lies heavy on courtyard and passage, and the shadow-line upon the pavement is too narrow to walk in; from end to end of the Neustrasse, no cooler little nook will be found than the basement shop of the cheese-mongers, Becker Brothers, as the firm styles itself on the white-lettered red sign-board over the stairs. True, the irrepressible sunlight wriggles its way down the eight narrow,

scooped-out, sandstone steps, peeps into the tilted cask of appetizing yellow butter, glides disdainfully past sacks of dry white beans and grey-hued peas, dances over a thick-headed family of cheeses, and winds up by tickling the nose of Uncle Tom, the huge black cat who lies curled on his rush-bottomed stool, and who, at some sacrifice of comfort and dignity, must keep his smoothly-bent paw outstretched to avoid continual sneezing. But Uncle Tom's nose marks the limit—beyond that point the sun never encroaches. Inside the air strikes cool; there is shade and a pleasing twilight.

Within this shade stands the white-scoured counter, with its glittering brass scales and slender, polished knives, flanked on the right by a big-holed, trickling Gruyère cheese, on the left by a red-streaked side of bacon—the pillars of the state—and behind the counter gleam, like a

couple of full moons, the friendly faces of the brothers Fritz and Johann Becker, the reigning heads of a world of nourishing abundance and savour.

On this hot Saturday forenoon, Herr Fritz's round head alone was visible behind the counter. Ever and anon he would get up from his newspaper to peer, with half-shut eyelids, into the outer daylight, when his fleshy hand never failed to glide caressingly over Uncle Tom's velvety coat, and give a knowing scratch in the sensitive region between the ears.

Some one at length arrived.

A big, unwieldy man; so big a hat, seen from the basement, one would have said it was impossible that he should force a passage through the low-set doorway. But he had just performed that feat, and with head drawn cautiously in between his shoulders, came down the stair and across the crackling, sand-strewn floor of the shop.

The burly individual behind the counter raised his hand playfully to his slightly grizzled forehead, and saluted in military fashion.

"Ah, here he comes, here he comes. Herr Johann Becke your servant, sir," he cried gaily.

The younger partner, who might have been taken for his brother's image as seen lengthened out in a concave mirror, extended a deliberate hand across the counter. They greeted one another as though long separated; Johann had been absent half an hour.

He wiped his forehead, and with careful fingers opened a large paper cornet that he carried on his arm. It contained the nosegay he had brought from the hop-market for his twin-sister, a Saturday institution of many years' standing between her and himself.

"Nice heliotropes, ain't they, Fritz? But I can't make out

what this red bell with the brown veins can be. Our Hannchen 'll perhaps know it. Is she in there?"

He pointed to the small yellow door at the back, leading out of the shop.

"Nay, she's upstairs, and Rike too. I told them they'd do better to come down, seeing how hot it is, for"—with brow solemnly puckered and raised forefinger—"a cellar is warm in winter and cool in summer! But they couldn't manage on account of the eel-soup." He smacked his lips, and added, as one who speaks with authority: "Eel-soup is something like!"

Johann grinned and nodded. "Well, then—I'll be back in a minute."

"My love to them," the other called after him, "and they mustn't be too long, nor let the dumplings get as hard as they did last time; and tell Rike that the 'Ghost of Rothenburg' has all turned up now, and that I've

laid the numbers in their right order."

And then Fritz handed Uncle Tom a slice of cooked pork-sausage, for Johann had forgotten to stroke him, and that was a more serious omission than a cat in the Becker household could be expected to put up with.

Covertly smiling, Johann gripped tight the door-bell of their common dwelling on the first floor, and with soft tread, unheard and unseen, went past the kitchen into the little parlour, which, with its bright beflowered curtains, its high-raised step in front of the windows, and its leather-covered armchairs, looked like a small relic of the last century. The scarlet-painted Chinese bowl stood in readiness upon the dainty inlaid sewing-table. It was the established receptacle for Johann's nosegay, and he went straight up to bestow it there, knowing well how Hannchen loved to have it—in

the centre the roses, and the slender fuchsia sprays overhanging the edge.

But he was scarcely half through his work when the door opened, and Hannchen, who had only come in for a bit of thread to tie up the soup-herbs, ran to him with a cry of joy.

“My Johann! Are you here?”

A little disturbed at having his surprise surprised, Johann suffered himself to be kissed and stroked and embraced. The sister was almost as tall as himself, with the same long face and quiet grey eyes, and the same look of cheerful serenity that one scarcely ever sees save in guileless children, or on the countenances of aged men for whom the world no longer plays a part.

Meanwhile sister Rike must have been wondering why sister Hannchen had not returned. Small and sturdy, in a lilac print gown that reached only to her ankles, and large white cooking-apron, she too now appeared at

the door, admonishing the flower-worshippers with her gleaming soup-ladle.

"Come, come, children, there's no sense in that," she began.

She habitually addressed the two as children, for she was Fritz's twin-sister, and ten years older than the other pair.

She broke off in her harangue to listen at the window. An organ was playing outside. The faint attempt at severity had vanished from her ruddy face.

"Listen, children, isn't that from 'Martha'?" And then with full voice she began to sing "Ah, so-o dear, ah so-o—" till a sharp hissing sound in the kitchen, and a strong odour of burnt spiced vinegar, made her waddle out uttering a cry of horror.

The younger twins followed, to give sympathy should an accident have befallen. But no harm had been done so far, and Johann returned to his duties as salesman in the shop below-stairs.

The eel-soup was to reunite the quartette in a couple of hours ; and breathes there the Hamburger in whose heart the glad, life - giving agitation aroused among the twins by such a prospect fails to kindle a responsive thrill !

Fresh pears, it is true, were not yet forthcoming, but Fritz had routed out an excellent kind of stewing-pear, and the eels were wonderfully firm.

As ill luck would have it, the enjoyment of this good repast in the little parlour—Chinese bowl and all complete ; flowers so arranged that Hannchen could see them while she ate—was not unmixed with alloy.

Two circumstances interfered.

Fritz had run a nail into his foot. It had gone through his thin house-slipper, and his boot now pressed so on the sore that he could hardly walk. And to-day of all days it was particularly awkward, as he had planned an unpostponable business ex-

pedition for this very afternoon. Klas Ohm at Kurslak had sent no message to explain the non-arrival of the expected hams, and naturally at this season all the world and his wife wanted to eat ham and green peas.

The second kill-joy was Dumpling. Dumpling had again disappeared. Every other minute Rike kept laying down her spoon to go and listen outside: surely a dog had barked, she thought. Dumpling was a very pickle of a dog, for ever bent on dipping his spotless white coat in the dirtiest puddles, always late for meals, and when out of doors in constant danger of arrest, for he hated the muzzle, and tore it off regularly every day.

In other respects, of course, a dog of irresistible charm and cleverness. Uncle Tom — he didn't hear if one omitted to say "uncle" — was this day the only member of the family who thoroughly enjoyed his dinner. He even displayed a certain en-

vious greediness, as though it were a point with him not to leave as much as a fish-bone or the frivolous-minded poodle. Uncle Tom was a confirmed stay-at-home; he never took an unnecessary step abroad.

The soup-tureen, but half-emptied, had been removed, and, all at ease, Fritz went limping cautiously up and down, to see what he was equal to. With inward misgivings Johann had watched his head-shakings and face-twitchings; he now rose and said in his quiet fashion—

“Maybe I had better be the one to go to Kurslak, Fritz.”

Amazed, the elder brother lifted high his wounded foot. Johann had never been charged with these distant missions—might they be confided to the boy? He eyed the big fellow with searching scrutiny, then at length said—

“Well now, do you really think you’d manage? If you thought so, it would be a thing

to do, for the matter is pressing." He limped once more across the room, and again paused standing before his brother. "The thing is, I ought to have taken half a dozen straight away. . . . Well, perhaps you could still do it. But mind, there mustn't be too much bone to allow for, and ask if they've been thoroughly smoked, lest we have trouble with them this hot weather. You know where the boat starts from; and mind you're back by eight."

Johann set off, and Hannchen waved her handkerchief from the window, as though cool breezes might thereby be wafted to him. The heat was indeed stifling; scarce a breath stirred. At long intervals would come a light lifting of the dust in the street, making scraps of paper and dry straw-wisps fly up and dance about. The sun disappeared from time to time behind fleecy white clouds; the sky had a violet tint as of a hidden glow.

“The poor boy won’t have a nice time of it to-day,” said Hannchen, pityingly. “If only he doesn’t go and drink cold beer! You didn’t caution him, nor I either. Oh, Rike, I never remember anything!”

But Rike said the boy was after all six and thirty years old, and would not be reckless; she couldn’t keep him for ever tied to her apron-strings, she had bother enough with Dumpling. That street arab had just returned and been straightway relegated to the wash-tub. Despite the hot weather and consequent drought, he had managed to find a puddle in which to disport himself. Therefore he must now sit trembling and crestfallen in soapy water till Rike judged fit to swathe him in her grey and black shawl, with scant regard to the free movement of his limbs. Finally he was carried like a wet parcel into the basement room where Fritz and “The Ghost of Rothenburg” awaited the sisters.

Together with other kindred spirits, the ghost had found his way to the twins in the papers used for wrapping purposes, which furnished forth a cheap and changing library. Of course it was sometimes rather fragmentary reading. The parts seldom fitted at the cheesemonger's; but to their own astonishment the readers came to recognize that most stories are far more entertaining if one begins them in the middle; it gives so much more to puzzle over and work out. Even the often lacking conclusion caused them no regret, but, on the contrary, set their fancy in pleasing motion; and as the two pairs of twins differed considerably in their tastes, they could always finish the story according to their own respective liking. Hannchen was fond of sad endings: stories of unhappy love, high-souled self-denial, heroic renunciation of life. With Rike couples must always pair, heroes never really

die, but only seem to be dead and come to life again at the right moment to celebrate their wedding. Fritz's needs were of a like kind. Sad stories depressed him, and he generally couldn't spare time to hear them to the close, and would interrupt with such remarks as: "I'm wondering if this weather's to last; we should have bloaters early if it did." Or: "Those Russians, they give themselves too many airs, and if I were the Turks—" a proof, as Rike pointed out, that his mind wasn't fixed on what was being read. Rike, it should be stated, was the reader. She had a full clear voice for her part, only, as Hannchen felt, she lacked tenderness in the love scenes. Hannchen used therefore to read these over again by herself, when it would become evident that Rike had omitted many passages. But to-day Rike skipped not a syllable, and revelled in the horrors of the spirit-world. Few customers

presented themselves. The chief press began towards seven o'clock, by which time Fritz's foot was so much easier that he limped in and out with all his wonted energy. The sisters never entered the shop; their brothers did not allow it, lest they should get cold feet, and they held it unfit work for women to handle great heavy knives.

So it was a pleasant afternoon, such as the Beckers had three hundred and sixty-five of in the course of the year, only that at the finest passages Hannchen could never help exclaiming, "If Johann were but with us too!" They were so little accustomed for one of their number to be missing, and least of all, Johann.

"Isn't it getting dark wonderfully early!" said Rike, as for the fourth time she wiped her reading-glasses.

A rolling, rumbling sound came from afar. Was it a heavily-laden waggon that made the windows

shake like that? No, it must be distant thunder.

"There's something brewing, surely," thought Fritz, who had limped to the window; "the sky looks like a bowl of buck-wheat gruel."

"And Johann has no umbrella." Hannchen cast a frightened, almost reproachful, look at her brother. "The poor boy! How will he ever get over the Elbe?"

Rike had hurried into the street. She now came back, holding her short skirts under her arm. "Children! children! It's like three storms, three rolled into one! And it's raining, too, already! Oh, if the boy were only back again!"

"He'll be under cover yet, anyhow; it's barely half-past six—keep away from the window, Hannchen, that crazy lightning is bad for the eyes—and he can't in any case be here for a good while," said Fritz, soothingly.

But rest was no longer possible for Hannchen. She was always

quick to take alarm—and now! At every clap of thunder she heaved a sigh, looking by turns to the door and window, while the needle flew through her trembling fingers. A storm while Johann was out in open country, or actually on the water! What a business!

Down here, in the Beckers' basement room, one knew only of a dripping from the eaves, and a rushing in the gutters, where a swollen, mud-coloured river tore along, of sudden, pale blue flashes and rattling windows, whenever the thunder burst forth. One sat only too safely and securely housed, especially after the shutters had been fastened over the shop-front, which lay well below the pavement. Time and to spare for anxious brooding and restless listening for Johann's footsteps.

At eight o'clock Rike laid the cloth for supper, but Hannchen was quite unequal to her round of bread, and even the two elders found it hard to eat when half-

past eight struck and brother Johann was still wanting.

"Children," said Rike at length, stretching out a hand on either side, "I beg you not to be so anxious. Eat a little, my Fritz ; Hannchen, you can't spirit him back by looking. Fritz, I'll fetch you a plate of cold eel-soup ; you only pecked at it at dinner to-day. You know, Hannchen, the boy is sensible enough ; he won't go and plant himself where the lightning's worst. Bless me ! it's beginning again."

The windows shook as though there were an earthquake. With difficulty Hannchen kept herself from screaming.

"We are all in God's hands," sighed Rike, turning an anxious glance upon her sister.

"If only it were me," said Fritz, shaking his head. "I feel so remorseful ; I should know better how to help myself."

Rike laid her arm round him.

"Ah, my lad, just think if I had had you both away."

“Come then, bring up the eel-soup,” said Fritz, deeply moved, “but I’m not going to eat by myself; you know that, you two.”

He had to eat alone, however. After a few spoonfuls Rike had had enough, and Hannchen’s spoon remained empty; she only held it in her hand to please her brother. Each time Fritz looked at her she smiled, but it was easy to see that the tears lay very near. Meanwhile Fritz had partaken heartily of his pet dish, and he now rose from the table munching his last dumpling.

“I’ll just go and see how it feels outside.”

“Look here, Hannchen,” said Rike, her eyes following him, while she collected the plates, “Fritz is so troubled because it’s through him that Johann has had to go—you mustn’t show him that you’re afraid. You see that, my good girl.”

Hannchen nodded sadly. The clock in the shop growled half-

past nine ; a sharp flash lit up the little room, and Uncle Tom, with hair erect and spark-emitting eyes, sprang down from his window-seat on to Rike's shoulder.

"I'll just see what Fritz is doing," muttered Hannchen, and slipped out. Hardly was she gone when Fritz returned, and coming close up to the elder sister, said in a tone of anxiety, "I say, Rike, I don't know what to think."

Rike was trembling all over her body.

"Oh, Fritz!" she answered, imploringly, "Hannchen is worrying dreadfully—you know she's not over strong ; you mustn't let her think that you, too, are afraid. You see that, my Fritz."

Then she put the wildly-excited cat on his arm, and ran after her sister.

Fritz now sat alone, and listened to the rain pouring down the basement steps and on the small, green, grated door,

which swung to and fro, and made the bell tinkle through the storm and darkness, as Rike said, like a hermit's bell. He grew uneasy about the sisters. Then Hannchen came back again, wet and shivering, from the outer air, which had suddenly turned much colder.

Fritz caught hold of her hand. "Ah! Hannchen, my little girl, you mustn't let Rike worry so much; you know it was only last winter that she had erysipelas, and since then she's been given to be nervous; she's never been the same again."

"Yes, Fritz, that's just what I was wanting to say to you; we won't seem to be thinking so much about it," murmured Hannchen, with tears in her voice; "I'll just see where she is."

Rike had a light in the kitchen overhead, and was fidgeting with the kettle at the tap.

"Are you there, Hannchen?" she called to her sister.

Hannchen wiped her eyes. "Poor Fritz is worrying so," she sobbed.

"Deary me, he'll turn up all right!" Rike forced herself to speak firmly. "But you're wet through; what have you been about now?"

"I only went as far as the market."

Rike clasped her hands together. "In those clothes? No hat? And in those thin shoes? Well, child, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but that does seem going a little too far."

Rike looked ready to cry with vexation.

"Have you lit a fresh fire?" asked Hannchen, and allowed her wet dress to be taken off.

"Yes, so that at least he may get some hot grog or mulled wine when he comes—but there's Fritz sitting by himself and worrying."

A slow step was heard coming from below, and Fritz's voice called out: "Children, children,

what are you doing? There's Dumpling gone now as well."

Renewed lamentations from the two sisters.

"I think I'll step on as far as the quay," said Fritz, "it seems—so at least I heard just now from our neighbour Krull—that there is no steamer at night."

The three looked at each other in dismay; then Rike began to think it was in a sense reassuring. "For that would mean his stopping all night in Vierlanden."

"He'll not do that, he'll not do that," cried Hannchen.

Fritz stroked his beard absent-mindedly. "I hardly think it either," he said, slowly; "but then, in that case, it's surely alarming."

Hannchen stared at him with wide open eyes. "How's he to get over the Elbe, then?"

"Hm, hm, hm!" and Fritz turned aside his head. "Do you know, I think, after all, I'll just run down as far as the quay."

Hannchen, overcome with

weakness, had dropped on to a chair. She just caught her brother whispering to her sister: "If only he's not taken a rowing-boat!" She even saw how Rike put her hand over his mouth. Then the room began to turn round; everything became blank and misty before her eyes, and she no longer heard.

The murmur of voices awoke her, and to her surprise she found herself lying in bed, but with all her clothes on excepting her shoes. It was dark in the room, save for a shaft of red light that streamed through the unfastened door. As she raised herself up, she felt something against her on the pillow, something solid and shaggy, and suddenly a warm moist caress greeted her groping hands. Ah the good poodle! How vehemently she pressed him to her! For fear had returned with the awakening, and lay like a nightmare upon her. She breathed uneasily. What was that within? An unknown

voice? She overcame her weakness, and with two noiseless footsteps, pale as a ghost, and not seeing clearly where she went, stood on the threshold of the lighted parlour.

It was full of people, so it seemed to her, and they cried out and came to meet her, and Rike said, "Thank God, she has slept her fill," and two faithful strong arms clasped themselves round her shoulders and guided her to a chair, and it was Johann's voice that whispered in friendly embarrassment, "Yes, Hannchen, don't you begin scolding now; we rowed over."

There he stood, safe and sound. She was still shedding tears of joy, and kept tight hold of his hand, as though there were danger of losing him again.

"You'd better have come by steamer to-morrow morning," said Fritz.

"I was to be home by eight"—Johann's eyes twinkled—"and as to letting you wait for me till

next day, that was not to be thought of; so we got into a yawl, this gentleman and I."

Hannchen looked up and saw an unknown face; till then she had seen only Johann. The stranger seemed to be watching her intently.

"Herr Tewes, Hannchen," said Rike, introducing him.

Hannchen looked down blushing at her shoeless feet, but the hem of her skirt covered them; then she glanced again at the stranger, and thought he looked very pleasant and friendly, with his erect military bearing and the slightly grizzled hair above the bright dark eyes.

"And you were in the boat together?" she asked, her gaze moving to and fro between him and Johann.

"It might have taken a bad turn," threw in Fritz.

"And it *did* take a bad turn—the boat did, anyhow!" laughed the stranger; "for we had certainly not counted on this

storm. And then, after the ducking, when one had managed to crawl topside up again somehow or other, I spotted him sitting there in his wet togs, and says I to myself, 'He'll be getting the rheumatics'—for when you've once had a taste of it, you know how such a thing is caught; and 'Herr — Herr Becker,' says I——"

"And you really fell into the water?" interrupted Hannchen, trembling.

"Yes, this is Herr Tewes' coat," said Johann, swinging its two long tails over his knees; "he insisted upon it, otherwise I should have got here an hour ago."

"If I can save a fellow-creature from an illness, is it likely I should not want to do so? And when it gets on to midnight an exact fit doesn't seem of so much consequence, does it, ma'am?" He swallowed a mouthful of grog from the glass standing before him, said "Prime tipples, this!" and gazed contentedly

upon the speaking faces that surrounded him.

"So the boat upset at the landing-stage?" asked Fritz.

"At the St. Paul's landing-stage. Not worth mentioning," added Herr Tewes, upon a look from Johann.

"And then you saved my brother?" murmured Hannchen, with folded hands.

Again Johann winked at him, and somewhat airily Tewes answered, "Yes, we managed to pick ourselves up again. At such a moment, you know——"

Hannchen shook from head to foot. She rose quickly, walked round the table, and held out both hands to the astonished guest, who, however, manifested no discomposure.

"Ah, dear sir," she cried, all smiles and blushes, "how are we ever to thank you?"

"Oh, pray don't mention it," he replied, pressing her hands, and at the same time pushing them back a little; "a friendly

welcome of this sort is most delightful " — he cleared his throat—"specially to a poor solitary beggar like me." His smooth, jolly countenance assumed a becoming air of dejection; he looked down with knitted brows, and clinked his teaspoon in the glass.

"Herr Tewes lost his wife six months ago," whispered Rike, sympathetically.

Tewes glanced hastily up and nodded sadly; then he pulled out his pocket-handkerchief, and used it with energy, murmuring, "No help for it, Ferd'nand, no help for it!"

The women were all commiseration; Fritz, too, rocked feelingly to and fro upon his chair. Johann said softly, "Oh, Rike, Hannchen has no glass."

Then the despondent widower began again: "And all this family affection — 'dear Fritz' and 'dear Johann,' and all that — after being accustomed to

the same sort of thing oneself, why it *does* knock a fellow over, you know—not to mention the shock I've had this evening, and I'm a trifle cranky about the joints into the bargain."

He moved his shoulder tentatively, and made a show of getting up.

"Shouldn't you go straight to bed?" suggested Fritz.

"It's hard to tear myself away," said Tewes, politely, "but I've a sort of damp feel about me. The way we've begun our acquaintance wasn't particular pleasant—still let's hope it'll turn out——"

"No, don't think of going," cried Rike, whom the last words had escaped, as she had been taking private counsel with her sister for some minutes past, "after doing my brother and all of us so great a service." She again extended her hand to the visitor. "It is getting on to one o'clock! If you would not mind putting up with the sofa——"

Yes, Herr Tewes would make so free, for to be sure it was Sunday to-morrow, when his furniture shop would be closed, and the servant girl wouldn't trouble herself about him, and "there is no one else!" he added, sighing regretfully.

And with a confident and satisfied air he surveyed the snowy feather-bed and beflowered coverlet which the friendly sisters were unfolding and piling up.

The talk was carried on till a late hour in the sisters' room. Hannchen wanted to know everything that had happened after her fainting-fit and during her long sleep. The danger Johann had passed through, and his happy escape, kept her brain in a whirl. And in the very next room his preserver lay slumbering!

Johann would have done just the same, she told herself, but how beautiful that there should be others of such nobility!

"Ah, how much we owe him!"

How much indeed!" And resolving to go to early service next morning, and sensible of a deep inner indebtedness, she at length dropped off to sleep.

There was a pleasant Sunday breakfast party next morning, for, of course, Herr Tewes could not be allowed to leave without taking his cup of coffee. He looked even smarter and brighter than he had done in the night, and he quite led the talk. His pun, about being "chary of time" as befitted a dealer in chairs, came forth so pat as to suggest that he had made use of it on other occasions, but no such reflection crossed the minds of the twins.

On Hannchen getting up from table before the others, to make ready for church, he also rose, and begged permission to escort her. Rather shyly, but in a friendly way, she said "yes," and then got herself hopelessly entangled in the black lace shawl which the gallant Herr Tewes strove eagerly to adjust upon

her. But no sooner was she equipped than up came Johann saying that he too meant to go. Hannchen's cleareyes brightened, while Tewes's face fell visibly. He exerted himself, however, to keep up a lively conversation with his gentle companion, and took leave ceremoniously at the church door.

Afterwards, and for the rest of the day, Hannchen's face wore a grave and solemn expression; the twins, all four, seemed thrilled into "a finer tenderness." Towards evening they joined in a beautiful walk along the ramparts, and enjoyed the windmill at the Millersgate, and the weeping willows beside the gleaming town-moat. But it quite startled them to find the dahlias already out.

"It's as if they came earlier every year! I don't like them a bit, and yet I am fond of all other flowers," said Hannchen.

On Tuesday afternoon, Fritz ran hurriedly up to the sisters.

"Herr Tewes is there, downstairs, in the basement room, with Johann. He's asking for you; I suppose I may bring him up?"

"Of course," they both said warmly, and put aside their sewing; "there's Uncle Tom's saucer still on the floor; pick it up, Hannchen, he might stumble over it. That's right."

Then a knock was heard, and the furniture-dealer funereally black as to his nether limbs, but all shirt-front and joyousness above, bowed himself in. He chanced to be in the neighbourhood and could not deny himself the pleasure.

"Oh, it's all on our side," insisted Rike. Then whispering Hannchen to see after the coffee, she asked how he was feeling.

Tewes looked at the pale-grey dress just vanishing through the door, and said, half to Rike, half to himself, "Well, I haven't often set eyes on such a genteel young party—just such another as my poor dear wife that was!"

"Ah, our Hannchen," began Rike rather taken aback, then stopped abruptly, for the quiet, slender being in the pale-grey dress had reappeared, and with a cheerful smile upon her face was placing the coffee-tray in readiness for the guest.

The brothers went in and out; the visitor remained sitting with the sisters, telling and listening with equal willingness. Mostly, however, telling. The "dear departed" figured several times, and never without exacting a moist tribute from Herr Tewes's bead-like eyes.

He came from Neustrelitz, but had been settled in Hamburg these twenty years; his business, wedded simultaneously with the dear departed, had grown from year to year. "As a simple carpenter's apprentice I wandered here, and likewise straightway into my Augusta's heart. She took to me, and I to her. 'Ferdinand,' she says to me, 'now you *are* here, stay. I sha'n't get a chance

of marrying a smart, active, young man like you *every day!*' She was a young widow, you see, and so we soon settled that business! And, only last year, I took in a house there was at the back of my place—couldn't get on without it any longer, and came in very handy, too—nice little garden to it and everything."

"A garden!" exclaimed the sisters, and paused in their sewing.

"Well, come to that, I could buy all the cherries *I* grow there just as cheap—the sparrows eat the most of *them*—leastwise peck 'em, and to tell you the truth, my poor dear Augusta never fancied 'em after the birds had had a go at 'em; and no wonder, grubbing about in the dust and stable-dirt as they do, and then poking among the cherries with their beastly beaks! No, that garden's more plague than profit to me, I can assure you! And then the starlings, confound

them! making a mess about the summer-house. I'm not so fond of getting my coat all in a muck when I'm sitting there, and the stains aren't easily got out of cloth neither — warm water's about as good as anything for 'em; but benzine or turpentine—not if I know it. Stood me in a matter of £1,300, that house at the back did; but then it's worth the money, weathercock on the roof and all. I like to sit and watch it Sunday afternoons, and see which way the wind is: and a shed close by if you want to beat carpets—it's a very complete concern altogether. Hope you'll give me a look in some day, Fräulein Hannchen. Eh, Fräulein Rike? It would be a great pleasure for me; and if you don't find the house, or I'm not at hand at the moment, you've only to ask for Herr Ferdinand Tewes. I'm well-known all about—like a bad shilling, so to speak—because I'm the only furniture dealer on the Hühnerposten, and also

because of my having put up that there house."

He pulled forth a thick envelope full of building-plans, estimates, and calculations of wages, which he then proceeded to unfold and read aloud. At this point, Dumpling, fresh from the tub, and emboldened by vanity, squatted down in front of him, and tried to attract notice by scratching him softly upon the knee with a woolly paw. Herr Tewes pushed the animal away, not so much as looking up. Whereupon the offended poodle opened wide his mouth and yawned aloud and unrestrainedly, lolling out his tongue the while in the direction of the reader. Highly diverted, Hannchen had noted this little drama; but yawning, even the yawning of a poodle, is catching, and at length Rike, whom her sister kept nervously watching from the side, had to yield to nature, shocked at her own breach of manners. Tewes, however, remained un-

suspecting; the noiseless trio were by him unheeded, and he went calmly on till Johann came in, when the stir of life reanimated the two sleepy faces. The poodle all but sprang over Johann's head for joy; he had hardly ever been so bored as on this day.

And then came Fritz, and hoped that Herr Tewes would stay supper, and Herr Tewes was very glad to do so, and under the influence of his glass of grog wiped out the recollection of the long-drawn afternoon in the happiest manner, with an astonishing outburst of gaiety. As a "simple carpenter's apprentice" he had wandered through most of the German provinces, and even beyond, and had poked his nose into many corners.

"And in Jutland they use only heather as fuel, bundles of it, and when there's a wind, and there nearly always is, you may get the whole boiling on your head, and stand a precious good

chance of flaring up into the bargain if your hair happens to be thick, and you use any oil or grease to it. And the wooden spoons they eat their buck-wheat groats with, that are just stuck away anyhow in a man's belt or coat-pocket, or whatever he's got on, without being so much as wiped,—no, upon my word! just licked round and put away.”

Then he vouchsafed a detailed recipe for Bavarian *knödel*,¹ and on hearing it through the sisters were of opinion that these were just like the Hamburg dumplings, only with the butter left out. And Tewes politely admitted that they were not half as tasty.

“But, you know, when I talk of *knödel*, it seems to have quite a different meaning. There's something of the mountains about it, something Tyrolese!”

And of a sudden Herr Tewes sprang up, puffed out his cheeks, screwed up his mouth, and blew

¹ Small dumplings.

a fine, melodious *jodel*, not the overpowering shriek of a wood-cutter or cow-boy, but a sound distilled and rarefied, suitable to the ears of ladies.

Amidst the admiring laughter and plaudits of the four twins, he at length resumed his seat.

"Ah, what a mere name can do!" he said, meditatively, addressing himself to Hannchen. "And yet, what's a name when you come to think of it? 'Name's a vapour,' says Schiller. Right, says I, and a deuced foggy vapour too!"

He looked very knowing, and repeated yet again, "a deuced foggy one! That's how it is in this world," he continued, sagely. "My Augusta always said, 'Ferdinand,' says she, 'let's call our best parlour the drawing-room. It sounds more genteel, and people would rather sit in a drawing-room than in a plain parlour.'"

Fritz and Rike begged for a repetition of the *jodel*, and he

performed again several times. In the confiding gaiety of his heart Herr Tewes then let out with a meaning smile that he had been a desperate wild dog in the days when he learned that *jodel*, and up to any amount of mischief.

“ But that’s the time for such things ; youth must sow its wild oats. There the Dutchman sees straight. And what says the Dutchman if a man comes and offers marriage to his daughter ? ‘ Ever been on the loose yet ? ’ says he, ‘ or got it all to come ? ’ And if he already has, then he gives her to him ; and if he only means to be, he says : ‘ Wait a year or two and then look in again, and we’ll see about it. ’ ”

Rike gave Herr Tewes to understand that she should like to hear something about his wild oats, but he wasn’t going to be betrayed into any such risky disclosures. He only re-affirmed with mysterious smiles and a

glance at Hannchen, who seemed not to share her sister's curiosity, that he had gone great lengths. At last, however, he related how one night, in a village near Schwerin, they had opened all the pig-sties and driven out the pigs. "And they went grunting all over the place, and then we appeared and gave it out that the bears had come down, and the people rushed with whips and flails and Heaven knows what, to defend themselves against their own pigs! It was a rare lark, and we half died of laughing. But one accident came of it, for, as I always say, you can't let off squibs in a cupboard; and the business wasn't of my planning, I only had a hand in it. What happened was, one of the pigs fell into a well that wasn't rightly covered, or something of that sort, and ripped up its throttle there, if you'll excuse the term. And it was a valuable animal, and we had to make good the loss; for of course they found

out that we'd had a finger in the job."

It had grown late by the time the furniture-dealer, buttoning up his coat, and guarding his trousers against Dumpling by means of his umbrella, rose to leave. The poodle yelped almost rudely as he went. In his antics mischievous joy expressed itself at the guest's having to go while he was free to remain. Between these two no cordial bond had yet been established.

But on the following Friday Herr Tewes came again, and likewise on the Sunday; and on the Monday there was noised abroad in the gossip-loving Neustrasse the startling intelligence that "Fräulein Hannchen Becker is engaged! She is marrying a wealthy furniture-dealer; the betrothal took place yesterday!" And then the addendum: "Just think of her catching any one! Of all strange things! She's no chicken, either."

Wonder was also expressed at the taste of the furniture-dealer in choosing such an old-fashioned spinster, who looked "as if she had come out of a picture-frame of the year one," with her smoothly-parted hair, and that grey, unflounced, untrimmed dress.

What, however, signified the wonderments and head-shakings of the neighbours as compared with the astonishment of the four good people whom the engagement directly concerned! For never had it entered the head of either of the brothers to "make a change"; amorous proposals had never been thrust in the way of either sister. They were such a close-knit group, like the four wheels of a carriage, and their old friends thought it as unlikely for one of the wheels to be loosened as that their eyes or ears should be supplied with independent being, and become adapted to live apart from their common body.

And now this outsider, this

personable Prussian, had come and asked to be taken into the fold! What a queer business!

Fritz was the one who beamed most, and was readiest to unbosom himself. He must needs tell every one who came that an engagement had taken place in the house, rubbing his hands the while and rocking his body to and fro. Then smiling, "Guess," he would add, "who it is." And when the future husband came to be asked about, what a double-chin he made, and how he swelled with brotherly pride! He had quite a father's feeling in the matter, for it was to him that Tewes had addressed himself with his offer, and it was from his hands that the sister had received her unlooked-for lover.

Rike, on her part, was in a state of bewilderment. The chief wonder lay in the fact of the lively Herr Tewes having so quickly and cleverly perceived the worth of her dear, quiet Hannchen, who was so retiring


and so little of a talker, and in his having preferred her to other and, maybe, prettier women. For such a well-to-do man must have plenty to choose from. She looked carefully at her sister when the latter next came by, and smoothed her rich, dun tresses. "My Hannchen, you've arranged your hair prettily to-day!" Or she would say, after such an inspection, "Won't you wear your blue bow in front?—it suits you so nicely"; or, "I think you should go in for some other colour than pearl-grey next time you've a dress to buy; we might consult Tewes as to his favourite shade." She brooded earnestly over plans for the outfit during the quiet hours of needlework. Her own portion, woven by her mother's hands, she had pressed her sister to accept on the very evening of the engagement, and had not let herself be dissuaded from that course either by a laughing refusal or tears of emotion. If Fritz was to figure

as the bride's father, it was for her to act as mother, and in her eyes Hannchen appeared more than ever as a child for whom not only must everything be made smooth and easy, but in whose hands the management of things was not to be left.

The "child" was a trifle unreasonable. She spoke neither of her outfit nor of her lover, but only of the coming change and separation. "When I am gone," "When I am no longer here," and, from the look of her wistful face, one might have supposed her to be contemplating an eternal separation. At the same time she would muse wonderingly over that Sunday when Fritz opened up the subject to her, and when she at length, regardless of the expectant wooer, threw her arms round her twin brother's neck, and from that stronghold made answer to Herr Tewes that she would gladly do everything he might ask, but couldn't be quite herself at once.

It had all been so very unexpected; she had never thought of such a thing as going away from home. Whereupon Herr Tewes, with friendly composure, had answered: "But we shall still live here! We are not going to America! Don't you fret, Fräulein Hannchen. I ask nothing better than to make a fifth here. Why, with all of us so nice and friendly as we are, a nest of turtledoves 'll be nothing to us."

Then laughter overcame her, and she was won. Unloosing her arms from her brother's neck, she extended a hand to her sister; in that way the engagement was concluded. Herr Tewes plighted his troth without a kiss. In their excitement, the twins didn't think about it, and he had not shown himself too assuming. He hoped the future held sweeter fruits in reserve, and was content to wait, though his thoughts wouldn't carry him further than a quarter of a year



from then. He would like the wedding to come off in three months.

Johann went about quietly as of old, brought more beautiful nosegays than ever of a Saturday for Hannchen, and didn't stir from the room on the occasions of Tewes's visits, the latter coming gradually to regard him with silent dislike.

Once Johann came to Rike in the kitchen, and without any preamble, asked her—

“I say, how long has she been dead?”

“Dead? What do you mean by dead?” cried Rike, startled.

“Sh! Tewes's wife!” answered he, looking round uneasily.

“Six months, I believe,” stammered his sister.

“Ah!” muttered Johann, and looked at her with so meaning an expression as to bring the blood into her face. By the time she had thought of a suitable answer her brother was off. Rike shook her head, but seemed absent-

minded and pre-occupied when Herr Tewes arrived and with easy assurance called into the kitchen: "Coffee on the boil, sister Rike?" a form of greeting which he had adopted towards her once and for all, and to which she was wont to respond with a little standing joke.

The twins were in the habit of taking a day's outing every year on the 15th of August, their most cherished summer festival. The shop was then closed, Johann signifying in big round hand on a sheet of paper that orders and customers would meanwhile be attended to by Herr Krull, the grocer opposite. When that notice had been posted up, and the waggonette stopped at the door, a solemn feeling always overspread the minds of the twins, as if, instead of being bound for Blankenese or Billwärder, they were making straight for Paradise.

The driver was of course Karl Müller, the shoemaker's son from over the way, who had a coach-

house on his premises, and who, in spite of his wild Crispinian tangle of beard and blackened fingers, sat stiff and upright on the box, and handled the reins with as much precision as he did his awl and thread.

This year it was not the twins alone who were rejoicing over the expedition; Herr Tewes, too, formed one of the party. He delighted in such diversions, deprecating only long journeys on foot, of which, "as a simple carpenter's apprentice," he had had enough and to spare. On his account the hour of departure had been fixed for seven, he having to come over from Hühnerposten. When in breathless haste he appeared on the scene, the hairy shoemaker's assistant was already mounted on his box cracking his whip in right Jehu-like fashion.

"Two hams are already inside," said Karl, with a confidential grin; "but as for her"—with a black thumb he pointed over his shoulder towards the window—"she's still at breakfast."

Now, however, the four twins came forth in holiday attire, and overflowing with delight that the day had proved so fine. Upon Hannchen's yellow straw hat there bloomed a handful of camomile flowers, and the airy white shawl hanging round her shoulders gave her quite a bridal appearance. But she looked a little scared at Herr Tewes's light-coloured person. He had laid aside his mourning in honour of this occasion, and was wearing a tall grey hat, which, in conjunction with a white tie, served to heighten the healthy glow of his complexion. He also carried a small cane in his hand, for he had made up his mind to take his icy bride-elect quite by storm this day. With all the fire of youth he sprang into the carriage, slapped the leathern cushions, looked out of every window, and, when Hannchen had taken her place, seated himself close against her, though without indeed getting much appreciation of this

manœuvre. For opposite sat Johann, and Tewes to his annoyance noticed that it was evidently easier for her to speak across than sideways, and inwardly determined to secure the opposite seat on their return journey.

The dry, clean streets were fairly quiet: the first stream of merry-makers had already passed the gates. They went by Altona to the Elbufer. The sun sparkled dazzlingly on the big clock-dial of the St. Michael's Tower; and upon the uncovered, dizzy, winding staircase high above, a figure with fluttering coat-tails was clearly to be seen climbing. That led them to talk of the wide view one got up there over the beloved native city, with its red roofs like an uncounted flock, and the crowd of ships in the harbour, and away, far out, the gleaming Elbe with its small green islets. "No one who's once seen it could forget that view," said Rike; "and do you remember, children, the

strong wind that blows up there, and the pleasant rest we had in the tower-keeper's great round room with that splendid green dutch-tiled stove and the big tiger-cat that lay purring beside it?"

"Ah! by the way, Tewes," began Johann, "you've been in Venice, haven't you?"

Tewes nodded.

"There's said to be a view something of the same sort from the church of St. Mark's—so I've read, at least," said Johann.

"Bless your soul, no—nothing like it!" maintained Tewes; "not a bit of green anywhere—nothing but dirty water and a lot of tumble-down old houses they make such a fuss about. Not *my* style of place!" He leaned out of the window, and pointed triumphantly to a big tree standing on the right hand.

"Just look at that, Fräulein Hannchen; they've got nothing like that at Venice."

"The Klopstock lime tree!"

cried the twins, delightedly, and Karl Müller stopped ; for here, at the Ottensen graveyard, the first halt was made. Tewes had offered his arm to Hannchen, but she soon left it and went to kneel down beside the grave of the pious poet, where in subdued tones she read aloud the inscription : " Seed sown of God to ripen by the harvest time."

Tewes drew close to Rike's side and said in a tone of sympathetic concern : " A near relation, I presume, that Herr Klopstock."

Rike's eyes opened wide in amazement ; she laughed audibly, and then, frightened at the sound, turned her kindly face towards Hannchen, to see if she had heard the question. No ; it had passed unnoticed.

Tewes, feeling rather bored, stationed himself against the trunk of the lime tree, tapped upon it with his yellow cane, and said, after laying his arm as a means of measurement round

the tree: "If this was cut the right way, there'd be timber enough for at least half a million hammer-handles!"

With a pained sensation the sisters looked up to the tree's proud crest, at its thousands of gently fluttering green hearts, in each of which the mysterious life-sap rose from cell to cell, diffusing a rich, quickening breath alike over the quiet dead, and such as yet dwell within the light of day.

Hannchen suddenly felt a tear in her eye; she bent down her head, and returned to the carriage.

"Yes, if one thinks of it in that way, you're right," said Fritz, "but this lime——"

Tewes looked very dogmatic. "I'm in the turning-line myself, so I ought to know what I'm talking about! Fräulein Hannchen don't seem quite the thing to-day?"

Merrily did Karl Müller crack his whip along the beautiful road bordered by stately houses that

lay half hidden in the verdure of their big gardens. Inside the carriage, however, the talk flagged somewhat. Then, by and by, they came to Ritscher's garden, and that brought another cheering halt. The broad, shady terraces were almost empty this morning; but in a copse near the river's edge, a sickly-looking man was seated in front of a solitary glass of beer. A tentative sniffing at his boots by the clean-coated Dumpling made him draw back his legs with a piercing cry of terror, and place them before him on the table.

Rike called her darling to her, and took him on her arm with the air of a chagrined mother.

"You don't seem to be a lover of these sort of beasts any more than what I am?" asked Tewes, stopping sociably at the stranger's table.

"I don't trust one of them; the creature might be mad," said the sickly-looking individual, eying the white poodle distrustfully.

Johann and Hannchen looked at one another; Hannchen cast down her eyes.

"And so you also don't like dogs?" Disapproval and surprise expressed themselves in Fritz's question.

"To tell the truth, I don't cotton to them," replied his prospective brother-in-law, friendly. "Bless my soul! tastes differ, you know; and there's no denying that they often go mad."

The twins became silent. At length Fritz suggested that a waiter had better be sought, and Tewes gladly took it upon himself to order dinner.

Even while he was away the four did not talk; they actually avoided looking at one another. But he soon came back, swinging his cane, and jolly as a sandboy as he presented Hannchen with a rather faded but doubtless well-meant rose that he had plucked somewhere or other in the garden.

Hannchen thanked him

smiling constrainedly. Rike threw her a look of encouragement; Fritz said, "My stars!" and Johann remarked, drily: "Against rules, you know, to pluck things here."

Tewes rubbed his hands. "The rose is the emblem of woman," he said, sentimentally; "a flower that's got no smell don't suit my father's son. It's a flower's business to smell, and likewise it's a woman's to be womanly. That way, you see, the two things help each other out," he added, instructively, watching at the same time to see what effect his words produced.

But Fritz alone nodded a "Yes, just so!" the others sat there silent, so that he began to feel rather uncomfortable. He tapped on the ground with his foot, complained of the faulty service, and finally slipped out to see about dinner, as he explained. But they first heard him stop a long time, chatting with the solitary visitor before he went any further.

"Ah, well, till people live themselves into each other's ways," observed Rike, carrying on an earlier train of thought.

"He is wonderfully lively for a man of his years," ejaculated Fritz.

Hannchen had laid the rose on the garden table. Dumpling sprang upon the seat, sniffed about the table, snapped at the rose, and ate it up.

"My goodness!" cried Hannchen, with a nervous titter, "don't you go and tell him."

Johann burst out laughing. "Dumpling eaten up the rose! Well, to think of that, now."

He stroked and patted the animal, as though he had done something particularly praiseworthy.

Then came dinner, over which the company grew talkative again. They drank Rudesheimer wine, and Tewes performed his *jodel*, that sounded like a barrel-organ among the green trees.

"And now bring some cards,

waiter," he said, when the cloth had been removed. "What do you say to a rubber, eh? A day in the country's apt to seem long," he yawned aloud. "Are you for whist or skat? I'm game for either."

Playing? Card-playing? And actually in the open air, on their cherished, long looked-for summer outing? In shame-faced embarrassment the twins confessed that they had never handled cards.

"Why, hang it all! what other way is there to kill time when you *do* happen to have any on your hands?" asked the astonished Tewes. And he added, sympathetically. "But if you don't know how to handle the paste-boards, you'd better begin this blessed minute, my beloved relations that *will* be. We must move with the times, and I call no man properly educated that can't play skat. I tell you what," he continued, looking at their puzzled faces,


“ I’ve a proposal to make. That gentleman at the table over there ’s a regular crack player—I asked him, for it struck me he had the look of it somehow—I’ll have a game with him ; we’ll play dummy ; you can look on, and ’get an idea of the thing—first-rate opportunity for you to pick it up ! ”

And so the unknown hypochondriacal gentleman came to their table, but only after being promised that Rike would keep the poodle on her knee, and he and Tewes then proceeded to play cards. The twins, who had begun by politely watching, grew gradually restless on their chairs as the two lost themselves in the absorption of the game. Fritz alone showed some interest and a certain understanding.

Tewes was right. It was indeed a long day, thought Hannchen, but how strange that it had never seemed long before. Had it not always been too short ? She got up gently,

noded to her sister and brothers, and went down to the river's edge. There she paused, gazing at the water, and not knowing what she saw before her. The waves gathered heavily and dull as lead, the surface neither smooth and mirror-like, nor agitated and foaming—the heat of a summer afternoon made the garden oppressive; the tall reeds, the silver-leaved willows, scarcely stirred; the gypsophila stood there with its faded pink flowers and gave forth no scent. Sometimes she caught the sound of quick, loud conversation—a jovial laughing voice—at which she would shrink into herself and look anxiously round. Presently a quiet, familiar step came along the gravel walk. It was Johann! Heaven be praised! They looked at one another, and then stood side by side watching the river.

Rike followed next. “Why, children, are you here?” She put her arm round Hannchen's waist, and now the three stood looking into the water together.



"I suppose they're still playing?" asked Johann

"Yes, they're still playing." Rike looked hastily round. "Well, you know, Johann, if one understands that sort of thing, and likes——"

"Yes," nodded Johann; "I thought we were afterwards to drive to Teufelsbrück and Blankenese?"

"As we did last year," added Hannchen.

"Ah, it's not likely we'll manage it now," said Rike.

"No, I suppose it hardly is."

They looked at the water again.

Then some one else came down the garden. "Why, it's you, my Fritz," exclaimed Rike. "Have you learnt it already?"

"Nay, I've not got that length," laughed Fritz, "all very well if one's up to it, you know, but as it is——"

"I say, won't they soon have done with it?" Johann's voice had a strange ring in it to-day; it was harder and more incisive.

Fritz scratched the back of his ear. "Well, you know, that sort of game takes a good bit of time."

"In that case there 'll be no getting to Blankenese to-day."

"No, we'll not get there to-day."

After a pause, Rike began—"What say you, children, won't we have to go back to them again?"

She took Hannchen's arm and led her to the table. The brothers followed. Tewes was holding the cards in one hand; he waved the other to them as he saw them afar advancing. "Well, stretched your legs a bit?" he called out; "but, Hannchen, I can't get over your leaving me out in the cold in this scandalous way. If that's how you begin, what'll it be when we're married? 'My place is by thy side,' " he sang, and pushed her a chair near him. Hannchen took it, and excused herself in a low voice; she had been standing a

little while down by the river; it was her favourite spot in the garden. Tewes now introduced her to the stranger as his betrothed, and then the stranger to her as a dentist of Ottensen, and an excellent hand at skat. Hannchen sat blushing painfully, as Tewes hung his disengaged arm over her chair, and then laid it on her shoulder. The dentist squinted at her from above his cards and inquired in feeling accents after Dumpling's condition. She sat as stiff as any doll till Rike, who had meanwhile been anxiously watching her, gave a sudden start and called out—

“My Hannchen, shan't we order coffee?”

“Surely,” whispered her sister, as if in a dream, and when she came back she seated herself hurriedly at the other end of the table.

Johann looked up and smiled at her. “It's beginning to drizzle,” he next remarked; “it's raining into the coffee.”

They drank it hastily ; the rain grew heavier.

"The best thing 'll be to drive home," said Johann in the same curious voice as before. "Don't you agree with me, children?"

Tewes was for continuing the game under cover, and showed annoyance at being out-voted. They had to crowd together in the carriage, for the dentist was added to their number : Tewes would not hear of anything else. The gentleman wanted to get to Hamburg, and they must take him. Dumpling, who had recognized his enemy, growled all the way in most unprecedented fashion.

"And I've had nothing of my sweetheart ; you've not so much as called me Ferd'nand," whispered Tewes to Hannchen, loud enough for every one to hear. The dentist squinted at her ; Hannchen looked straight in front and blushed, not knowing what to say.

At length the Millersgate was


reached, when the stranger quitted them. It turned out that the rain had stopped; the evening sun was at play amongst narrow-shredded clouds, black-blue and copper-coloured, and a pleasant freshness went up from the well-washed trees. The state of things was so inviting that the party determined to do the remainder of the way on foot.

Here in the town it seemed to have rained less. The stones had already dried up, and in front of every door and flight of steps people were seated chatting, or silently resting after their day's work; the children noisy as sparrows before roosting time. Through open windows came the twitter of canary birds, and the laughing and screeching of parrots. From the Mühlenstrasse a lively tune might be heard—the strains of a flute—a Hungarian dance. And as the party drew near, they saw the musician—an old man with

wild grey locks and long dark moustaches—who stood and piped in the midst of a group of dancing children. He had a bright red cap upon his head, and wore an embroidered jacket and baggy blue breeches, all in rags indeed, but which yet hung upon his tall, stately form with a certain suggestive fitness. His eyes gleamed from beneath his hair at the joyous capers of the dance-loving Hamburg children, who can never hear music without running out into the street to waltz.

The twins remained standing; Tewes, too, laughed at the gay scene. The old man piped untiringly, while the evening light streamed above him; untiringly did the children dance on road and pavement, springing nimbly aside only when a carriage passed along.

“They’d dance the night through to that squeaking,” Tewes was just saying, when suddenly the tune stopped short,



The pipe fell to earth, the old man shrank of a heap, opened his mouth, gasping a few times, and then, with closed eyes, lay still. The children sprang away screaming; a crowd quickly collected, among them the twins—the sisters trembling and tearful, the brothers eager to help and deeply moved. Tewes also. It was, indeed, his hand that first tried to raise up the old flute-player, who, however, fell back heavy and lifeless on his side. He was dead; a heart attack had suddenly ended him before their eyes. They watched till they had seen him carried off; then they went home.

“Who’d have thought it,” said Tewes. “To think of it happening to us! After such a pleasant day as we’ve had too!” He glanced at Hannchen.

“Why, my goodness, Hannchen, you’re never crying? And just for an old tramp like that? Come, now, if you go in for being so tender-hearted, what’ll

it be if I kick the bucket, or one of your——?”

He seized her hand.

“Ah, I’m not mourning,” stammered Hannchen; “on the contrary, it was so beautiful.”

“Beautiful? that tootling? Well, I’ve heard better than that in my time,” laughed Tewes in surprise. “Come, now, lean upon my arm; this unpleasant business has upset you.”

But she retreated a step. “Thank you; I’m really not accustomed—at least only with Johann, I mean.” She took Johann’s arm, but felt remorseful and uneasy on seeing his offended face.

“You’d better stick to your accustomed ways,” he burst out. “Don’t let me stand in your way any longer. I’ll wish you all good-night. Pleasant dreams.”

And with head erect and swelling chest, he wheeled round and marched stiffly down the street without looking back,

straight in the direction of the Hühnerposten.

The last evening hours went very silently by. In the night Rike was roused by an unwonted sound. "You're surely not crying, Hannchen, are you, child?" she asked, with bated breath.

"No," was the sobbing reply.

Rike got up, groped her way to her sister, and felt her face.

"Things can't be going as they should," she murmured, at a loss what to think. "I believe, Hannchen, you see no end of difficulties that don't really exist."

"Yes," murmured Hannchen.

"You should bear in mind how strange he is to us yet," urged Rike.

"Yes, that's just what I think."

"But that must always be so with an unknown man," continued Rike, meditatively.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"But he's a good man, isn't he, child?"

"Yes, he must be, seeing that

he pulled Johann out of the water."

"We can never forget that, can we, child?"

"Oh, Rike, I can't think how I come to be so ungrateful!"

"It'll all be right in time," the sister said, soothingly. "Hark, now, at that tramping up and down close by."

"It is Johann; I know his step, Rike."

"Bless us! then he can't get to sleep either! My goodness, children, what's to become of us?"

"Go you to bed again, Rike—it's all of no use this." She hid her eyes in the pillow.

"Shall I ask Johann why he's not sleeping?"

"Nay, let him be, Rike. I know he's of the same mind as myself."

"Do you think he doesn't like him?"

"Yes, that's just what I do think, and it makes things twice as bad."

Tewes did not put in an appearance next day, nor the one after that.

On the third day, at coffee-time, he came, but passed the kitchen door without his customary joke, and surprised Hannchen seated alone in the parlour at her flower-decked sewing-table.

"With your flowers again, as usual," he said, rubbing his hands and laying his hat upon a chair. "'Sweets to the sweet,' eh, Miss Hannchen?" He stooped down to look into her eyes.

But on perceiving her embarrassment he put gallantry aside, and said, in a tone of decision: "We were speaking of womanliness the other day, and I should just like to ask you if you call it womanly that a girl, when she's engaged, should make a fool of the man she has promised to marry, and should go off with her brother, or some such person whom she sees every day of her life."

He had seated himself at his

ease, and looked her sternly and steadily in the face.

"I am so sorry," began Hannchen, "but——"

"Yes, mind you, that *but*!" He grew yet sterner. "It's not as if you were a child—and, good heavens! that I should be treated in such a fashion! My Augusta! If you had but seen her! How she did pet me to be sure! You surely know what a man looks for. A man in my position has a right to expect something!"

"I beg you to——" murmured Hannchen.

"It's I, now, who am going to beg you something," replied Tewes, and struck himself on the chest; "or rather, I must insist"—he cleared his throat significantly—"I must insist on your behaving to me in a proper manner, or else——"

His face assumed an air of Olympian gravity. Deathly pale, Hannchen supported herself against the little table that vibrated sympathetically.

"Perhaps," he said, in a cold and hollow voice, "it had better all be at an end between us."

Hannchen let go the table; the colour returned to her cheeks; she looked up at him, and answered, shyly, yet very distinctly—

"Oh, Herr Tewes, if you *wouldn't* mind, if you'd only be so good as to let it be at an end, I—I should be so grateful to you!"

In blank amazement Tewes contemplated the childlike supplication of the folded hands, and the almost tender, upward glance of the deep grey eyes.

"At an end, eh? Oh! well there'll be no sort of difficulty about that; I can oblige you *there* any time," he said, crimson and gasping; "only got to take myself off, you know, and you're rid of me, but, mind you, it's for good. You won't catch me coming back in a hurry."

He snatched up his hat, and looked at her once more. She

meant it seriously. As he went away he caught the sound of her eager call—

“Children! Rike! My Johann! Herr Tewes will be so kind as to—he, too, thinks it best—we are to remain together.”

With an angry step, unhalting, he walked as far as the adjacent wine-vaults, paused a moment, and, scowling darkly, disappeared among the vats.

The four twins stood round the little sewing-table and its Chinese bowl, light of heart, with beaming faces, almost overcome by excess of joy. Fritz had had one faint moment of regret as the thought of Tewes's large fortune crossed his mind; but Rikeclapped him on the shoulder, stroked his face, and seated herself on a footstool beside him.

“You didn't let it be noticed, but I saw well enough how you were feeling, my Fritz,” she whispered in his ear.

Fritz looked at her, blinked a

little, and then of a sudden nodded vehemently.

"Yes, yes; it's best as it is," he said; "you women are the safest judges of these things."

Johann had tight hold of Hannchen, as if after a painful separation.

"If only I'd not had to be so ungrateful," sighed Hannchen—"so ungrateful to one who saved you from drowning, my Johann!"

Johann gave a low, embarrassed laugh.

"Well, if it's worrying you so badly, Hannchen, I may as well let you know that in point of fact it was just the other way—only I didn't care to have it talked about, and told him he wasn't to blab, and so you got hold of it wrong way about."

Hannchen fell upon his neck.

"Oh, my Johann! Now for the first time I feel really happy again!"

There was such joy and laughing that Rike could see nothing

for it that night but to brew a bowl of punch.

“We shall remember those six weeks, eh, children?” she sighed. “Thank Heaven, it already seems to me like a bad dream!”

But the next-door neighbours were matter-of-fact people, and when they heard all that sound and laughter in the habitually sedate Becker household, they exchanged meaning looks with one another, declaring—

“It’s the eve of the wedding that they’re keeping in there all by themselves, and we must throw in a bit of crockery.”¹

And they came and threw pots and plates down the basement stair, with noise and commotion, and one person contrived to direct his missile in such a way as to make the back-door fly open.

And lo! to their wonder the twins were there all by them-

¹ An old German custom on the eve of a wedding.

selves. They sat round the lamp and punch-bowl, and on the right arm of the sofa, close to Fritz, sat Uncle Tom; and on the left, at Rike's side, the snow-white Dumpling was standing on his hind-legs. And Hannchen, with gleaming eyes, was just looking up from the book out of which they had been reading, to say—

“A beautiful love story that, wasn't it?”

Then Rike nodded smiling to the neighbours: “It's off; the engagement's at an end.”

“They're a rum lot,” said the others, and went home shaking their heads.

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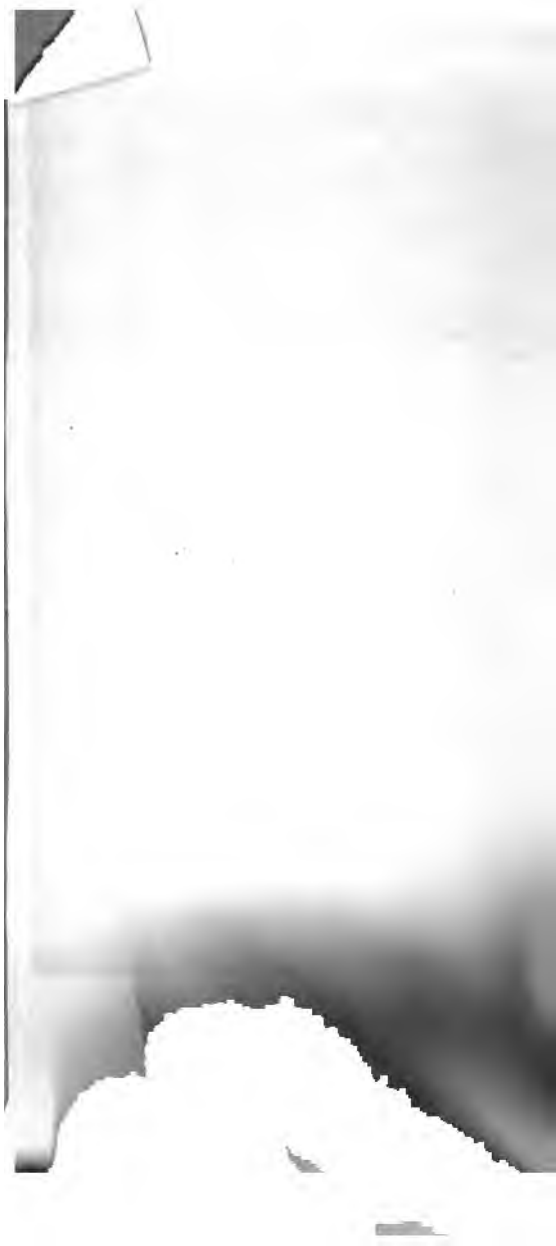
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